

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM HATHAWAY'S FLASH

VOLUME.01

Yoshiyuki Tomino



Zeonic | Scanlations

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM
HATHAWAY'S FLASH
VOLUME.01



MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM HATHAWAY'S FLASH

VOLUME.01

Yoshiyuki Tomino



MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM **HATHAWAY'S FLASH**

VOLUME.01 • TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prologue

Chapter.1
Gigi

Chapter.2
Lounge

Chapter.3
Kenneth

Chapter.4
Hijack

Chapter.5
Hathaway

Chapter.6
Landing Craft

Chapter.7
With Gigi

Chapter.8
Hotel

Chapter.9
Contact

Chapter.10
Hunter

Chapter.11
Minovsky Craft



MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM HATHAWAY'S FLASH

VOLUME.01 • TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter.12
Be Frightened

Chapter.13
Commander

Chapter.14
Young Pilot

Chapter.15
Circe Unit

Chapter.16
Runaway

Chapter.17
On the Ocean

Chapter.18
Dining Room

Chapter.19
Lodoicea

Chapter.20
Pathway

Chapter.21
Take Off

Chapter.22
Showdown



PROLOGUE

Who was it who wrote that time leads us to forget?

The only ones who have dared to utter such words have been either optimists, or those who have glimpsed the truth and are familiar with utter despair. In either case, one would do well to remember that words are both vague and multifaceted, and so rarely tell us the truth. Nevertheless, the story which I am about to spin in those same words is one that has been told throughout countless eras, and one which deserves to be handed down until the end of time.

The sadness of our mortal world. The pitiful sorrow born out of the very existence of said world... These things which so assail us are born of something as frightfully simple as our own existence. Constructed in a way that means that we continually let slip the happiness that we so crave, we humans are creatures of sorrow. And when one considers that the only freedom granted to the protagonists of this story is the wild hope that there may come a day when they are freed from that cycle, one is bound to cry out with shock and sorrow that this is the tragedy of mankind.

Countless generations have passed since the dawn of the Universal Century, and mankind has expanded his territory to colonies between the Earth and Moon... Initially, it was believed that this increase in living space might open up the opportunity to save the Earth, which had long since been polluted by mankind's hand, or at very least the chance to extend its lifespan. Yet though the new territory represented only a pathetically tiny portion of the vastness of space, mankind's continuing adherence to petty divisions and classifications meant that wars of class, race, and territory did not come to an end. Rather, it appeared that the expansion of territory only fanned the flames of conflict between those of different classes, different regions, and different lines of thought.

Naturally, a shared awareness of the critical lack of living space in

the latter years of the Earth Age meant that mankind had temporarily ceased its conflicts. And for a while, at least, there had been an era of frustration where the various disparate elements of mankind had managed to coexist. However, once space had been colonized, mankind appeared to recall its natural instinct toward oppressive conflict and war. One could well say that the expansion of territory only provided seeds for new conflict. When mankind took to the stars, he may have discovered yet more space in which to act out his primal instincts.

History, it appears, has run backwards...

It may be the case that mankind is destined for such folly. There is a theory that when frustrations peak, we naturally create enemies, and that acts of terrorism which serve to fan the flames of aggression are simply the natural outcome of such a situation. It is easy to decry such reactions as irrational, but such words cannot quell the tide of human frustration.

For words are so often lost in the void of space...

Yoshiyuki Tomino
November 5, 1988

GUNDAM MECHANICAL DATABASE

Ξ-GUNDAM

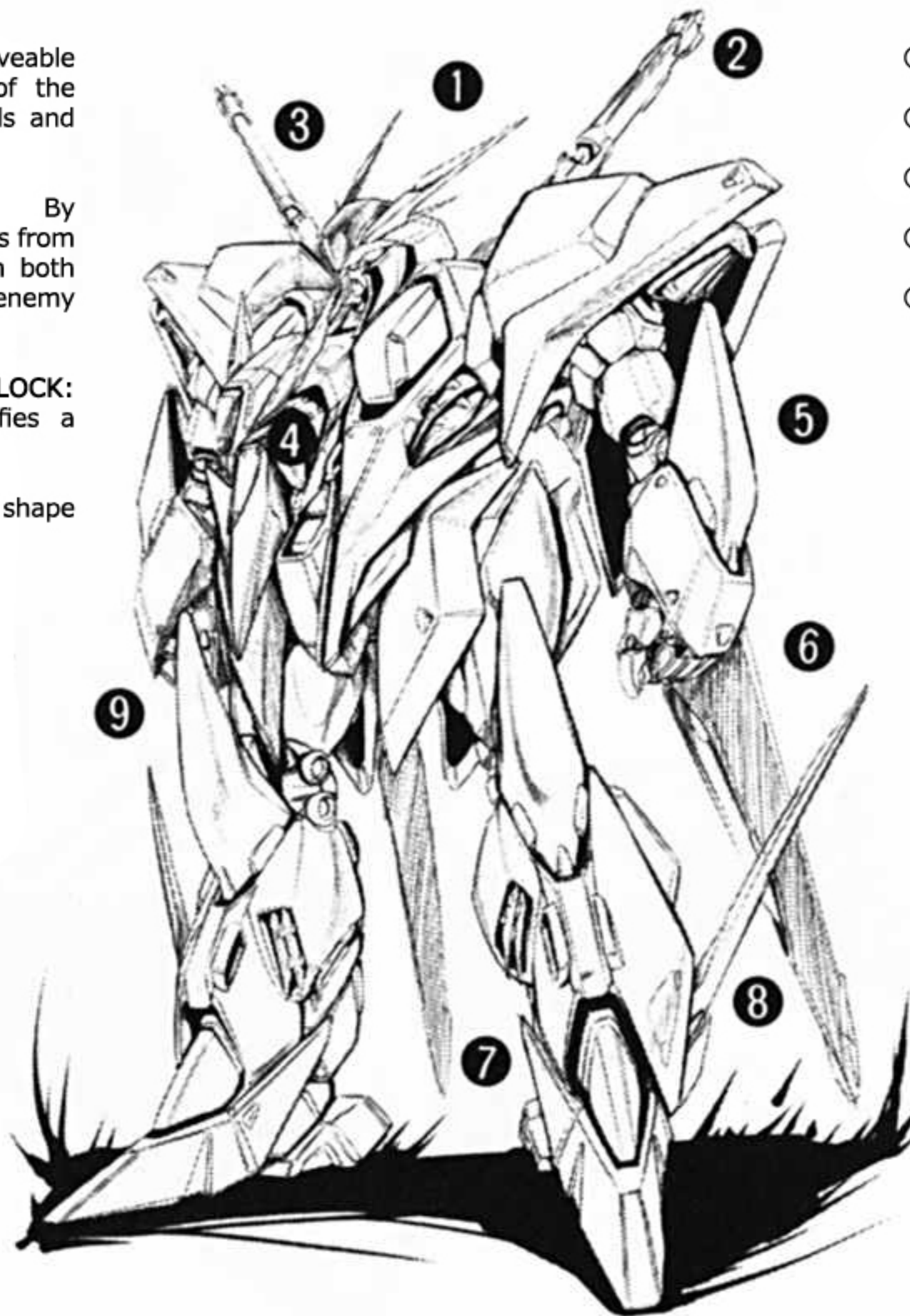
A state-of-the-art mobile suit that the secret society Mufti Nabiyu Erin ordered behind the scenes from the lunar conglomerate Anaheim Electronics. Equipped with a Minovsky Engine, simulated anti-gravity propulsion is possible. The name XI is given to it with the intention of succeeding the Nu Gundam, the last unit that Newtype soldier Amuro Ray used.

① HEAD SENSOR: Moveable as the upper portion of the antenna shifts backwards and forwards.

② BEAM SABER: By generating mega particles from the torches mounted on both shoulders, bisection of enemy mobile suits is possible.

③ HEAD PSYCOMMU BLOCK: A system which amplifies a pilots brain waves.

④ COCKPIT: Mimics the shape of the head.



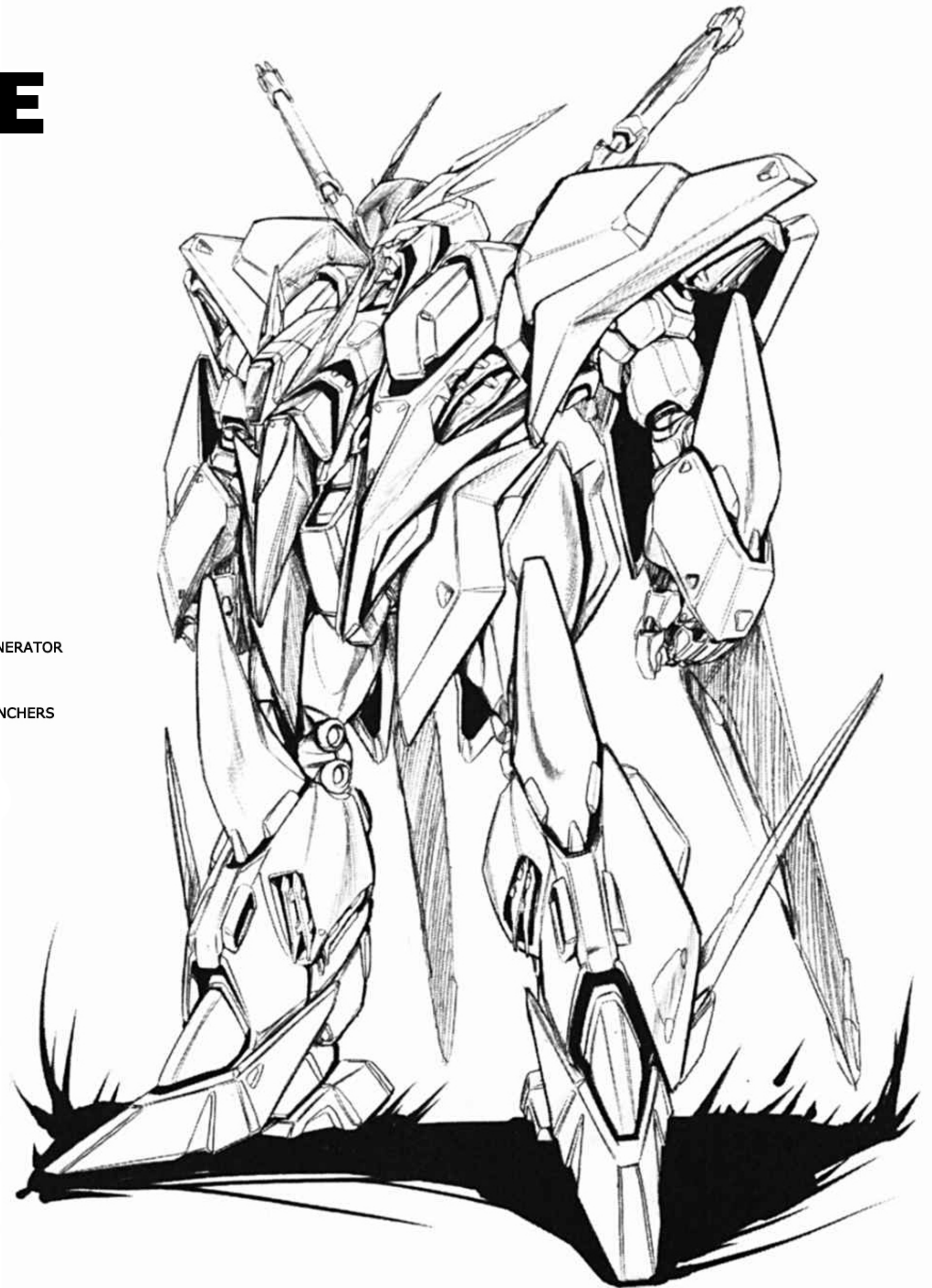
⑤ ARM-MOUNTED MISSILE LAUNCHERS

⑥ MINOVSKY CRAFT GENERATOR

⑦ LEG-MOUNTED MINOVSKY CRAFT GENERATOR

⑧ STABILIZER

⑨ KNEE-MOUNTED LARGE MISSILE LAUNCHERS



MOBILE SUIT PENELOPE

The Penelope is a state-of-the-art mobile suit assigned to the Federation Forces anti-Mufti unit known as the Kimberly Task Force. Equipped with a high output Minovsky Craft, the model is expected to turn the tables of mobile suit utilization in the atmosphere. It has traces of Gundam-based mobile suits in the frame design itself.

① MAIN SENSOR

② MULTI-SENSOR: Equipped with four vulcan guns at the tip for close combat use.

③ FUNNEL MISSILE RACK

④ ARM-MOUNTED MAIN MINOVSKY CRAFT GENERATOR

⑤ MINOVSKY CRAFT: Integrated with the multi-sensor, the parts extend over the back. They allow for high-speed turnaround during flight.

⑥ LEG-MOUNTED MINOVSKY CRAFT

⑦ MONOEYE: Becomes the main camera during high-speed flight.

⑧ COCKPIT

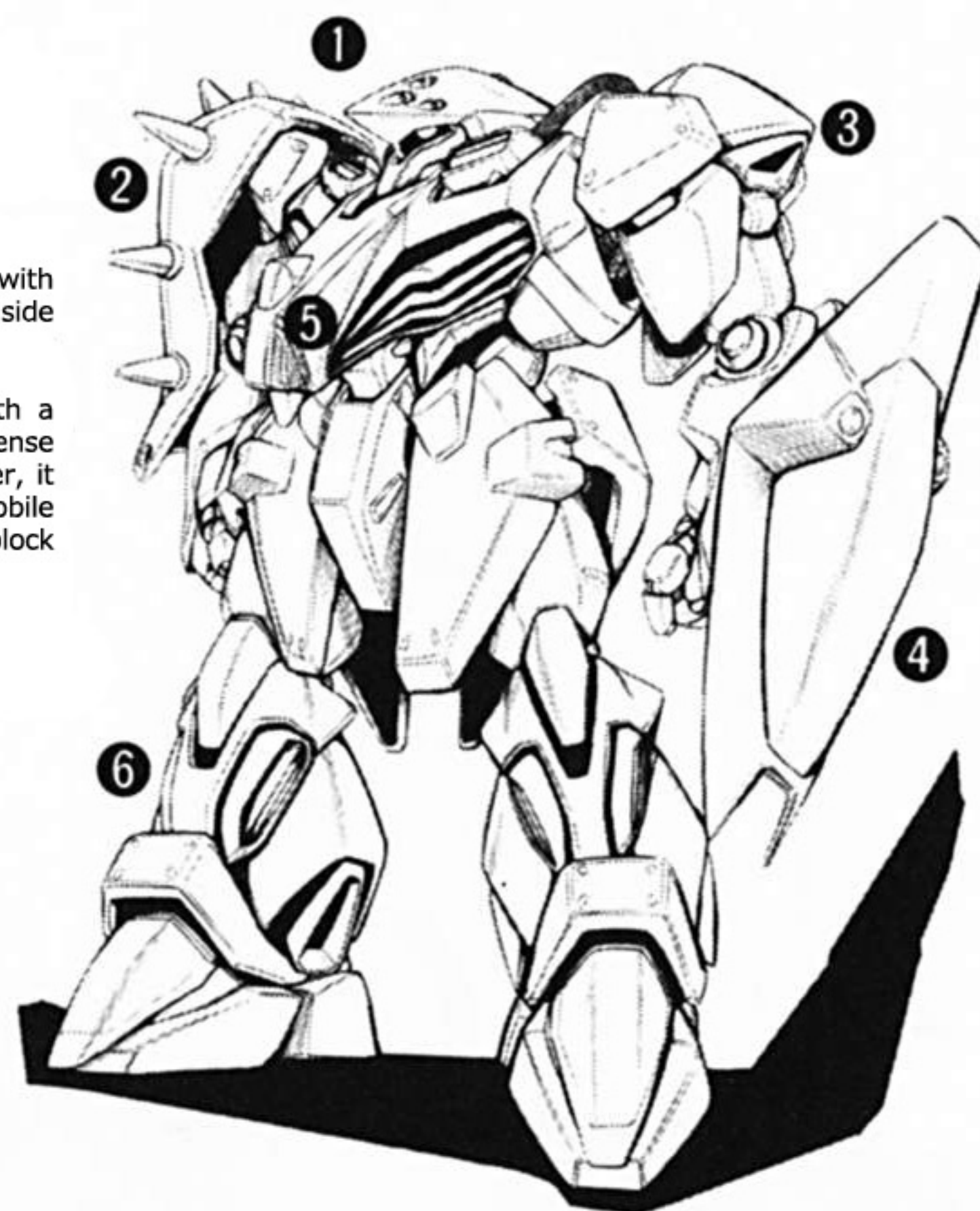


MOBILE SUIT MESSER

A mass produced mobile suit utilized by Mufti. A heavy mobile suit equipped with heavy armor, the Zeon military design influence remains strong in this model. The Messer utilizes a monoeye type main camera.

① VULCAN GUN: Equipped with three vulcan guns on the left side of the head.

② SHOULDER SHIELD: With a shield for offense and defense attached to the right shoulder, it is able to repel enemy mobile suits with its large shoulder block during ground combat.



③ SHOULDER MOUNTED APOGEE MOTORS: Verniers that control movement in outer space.

④ SHIELD: Equipped with beam sabers and various weaponry on the reverse side.

⑤ COCKPIT

⑥ MAIN THRUSTERS

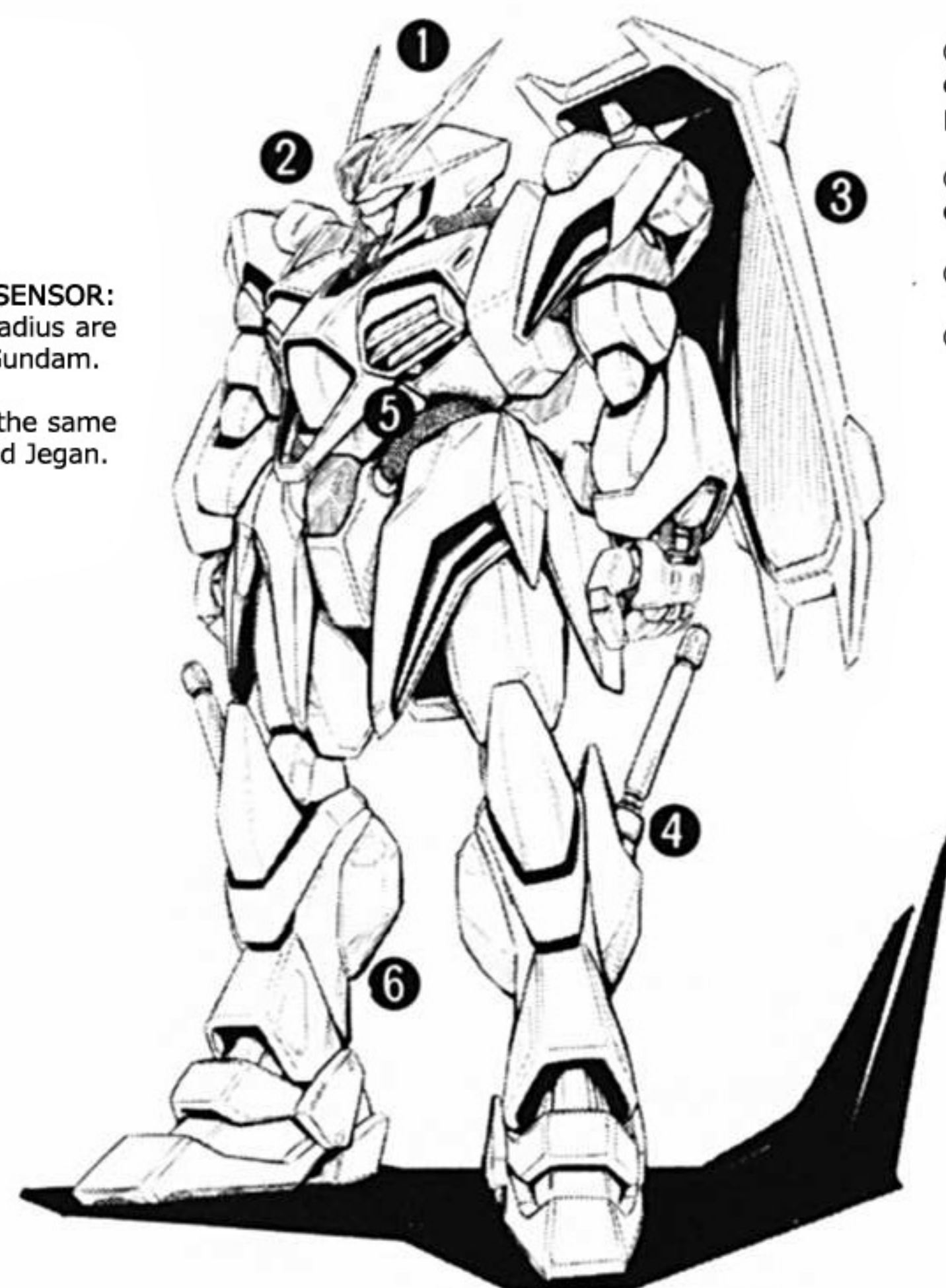


MOBILE SUIT GUSTAV KARL

The mobile suit Gustav Karl comprises the Kimberly Task Forces' main forces. A general-purpose mobile suit, it's an extension of the design concepts of the former mass produced units such as the GM and Jegan. Its basic specs boast of a height that pass even that of a Gundam type. However, much like traditional mobile suits, independent flight is not possible in the atmosphere without utilizing support mecha.

① HEAD MOUNTED MAIN SENSOR:
The abilities of the sensor radius are on par with that of the Nu Gundam.

② MAIN CAMERA: Adopts the same type of goggle as the GM and Jegan.

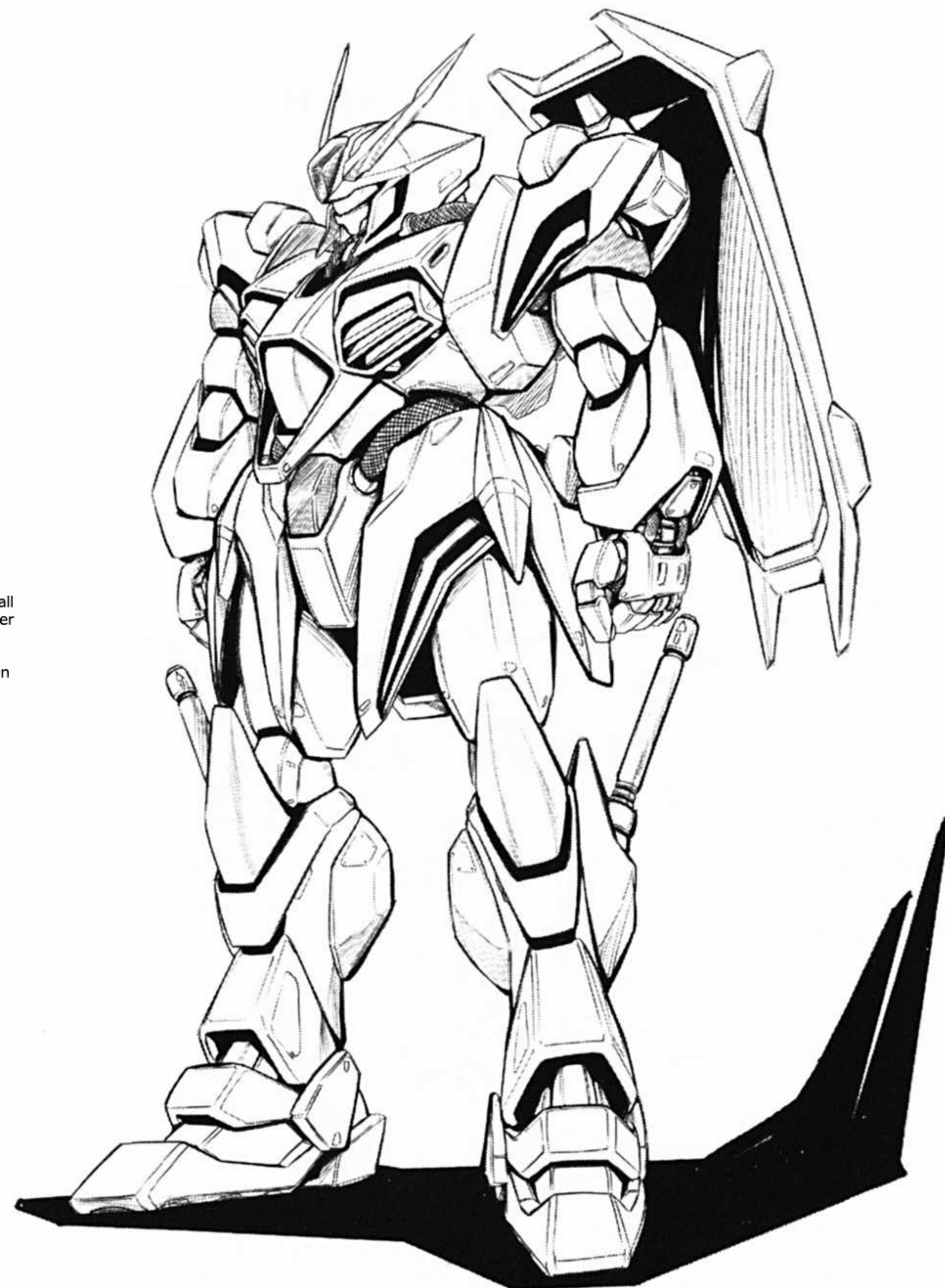


③ FLEXIBLE SHIELD: Able to move in all directions, the shield mounted on the left shoulder protects the body from enemy attacks.

④ BEAM SABER: One beam saber is mounted in either of the legs.

⑤ COCKPIT

⑥ LEG MOUNTED MAIN THRUSTERS



Cover & Book Illustrations
Haruhiko Mikimoto

Cover Cell Work
Fumi Tsumugi

Frontispiece Illustration
Yasuhiro Moriki

Frontispiece Cell Work
Kumiko Nakayama

Translation Work
Zeonic | Scanlations

CHAPTER.1

GIGI

"Would you excuse me..."

"Oh, of course."

Captain Kenneth Sleg yawned three times before standing and addressing the early twenty-something year old young man opposite the open seat between them. The young man, who had been reading on his laptop, gave Kenneth a carefree smile and stood the laptop on his lap to let him pass.

Although it was zero gravity, merely floating over to your seat would earn you the ire from other passengers. Half of the passengers on today's shuttle flight aboard the Haunzen were a bunch of the privileged class. If he performed a spacewalk in front of them, they could very easily put a stop to any promotion chances, or much worse. He was grateful, though, that there weren't any government officials with military affiliations, but the result would be all the same.

Out of the corner of his eye, Kenneth caught one of the Earth Federation cabinet ministers engaging in the usual flattery towards a young girl that everyone had been talking about as he moved to the restroom at the rear of the cabin.

The flight manifest of Flight 356 was about forty passengers with a crew of five. It was an exclusive flight; you either have to pay a hefty fee or have a slew of connections for the privilege of boarding. So, as long as you're on this ship, whether it be to Earth or a space colony somewhere, you were exempt from the arrival and departure checks. The very fact of being aboard the ship guaranteed ones credentials. Furthermore, aside from military aircraft, this flight is the only one capable of landing directly on Earth.

The youth next to Kenneth gave an unabashed impression of coming from a family whose social standing must have connections;

which was in keeping with the *Haunzen*. With a frivolous sense, he questioned the young girl in her late teens who was being flattered by one of the cabinet ministers. There was something vulgar about her, something which made it impossible to categorize her as a passenger of class.

"Gigi Andalusia, was it?" Having finished his business, he stood in front of the mirror, thinking back to the name of the girl who was whispered amongst the gentlemen passengers.

As he was readjusting the front of his suit, he thought there was a sort of coolness to the style of clothing, though he didn't care much for the look. As for his own good looks, however, he didn't mind at all.

"Had the Kimberly Task Force of handled things properly, I wouldn't have had to come here in such a hurry."

Those were his thoughts on the matter at least.

Following Char's Rebellion, the Earth Federation Space Forces had not been involved in any real combat and were even bereft of potential enemies. Yet in spite of that, Kenneth had been meaninglessly engaged in the ongoing development of new model mobile suits. Although his fighting spirit surged at the thought of the possibility of real combat again, his assignment on Earth was not something that appealed to him.

That said, he was still a young man.

With the activities of an anti-Federation government organization calling themselves Mufti Erin intensifying on Earth, the Kimberly Task Force was charged with moping them up. Ten days ago, the new model mobile suit Penelope along with its test pilot, who happened to be Kenneth's subordinate, Rein Eim, were dispatched.

Immediately following that, however, Kenneth himself had received orders to assume command of that task force as a successor. That was the day before yesterday. Which was why Kenneth, having made use of military privileges, was able to board the *Haunzen*, the quickest flight to Earth.

Being on the flight in the company of the cabinet members, however, merely served to confirm what a bunch of utter low-lives they really were.

"Even if I'm killed by Mufti Erin, I'm not in any position to complain..." is what he had come to think.

As he adjusted his tie, he wondered why it was that Julie felt she needed to part ways with such a dashing man. It hadn't quite been two years since their divorce.

Leaving the bathroom, he peeked into the lounge.

Three couples, the cabinet ministers with their spouses, sat around chit-chatting with drinks in hand. Apart from them, another three high-level officials formed a lonely tableau as they played video games. With that, he returned to the cabin.

"?!"

The cabinet minister who was chatting with Gigi Andalusia was

nowhere to be seen.

Kenneth floated up to the side of the seat belonging to the infamous young woman seated in the row before his. He glanced down at her knees. On the laptop's display appeared to be moving pictures.

The young woman's long, transparent blond hair covered her shoulders, her eyelashes glinted with the same transparent radiance. As a Caucasian, her face may not have elicited much fanfare, but her skin on the other hand, with its Oriental smoothness and Latino coloring, only served to reinforce the transparency of her blond hair.

Despite being a typical soldier, Kenneth was not as rigid and austere as his appearance would suggest. Nonetheless, the ease that he found in talking with the young woman was in part due to the air of enjoying the company of men she imparted. This also accounted for why men aboard the flight, despite the disapproving looks from their spouses, were able to come over and speak to her one after the other.

"Do you mind?"

"No, not at all."

Although she didn't give off a feeling of being surprised, her look said otherwise as she was addressed by an unexpected male voice. It all seemed rather elegant, the rate at which she raised her face won him over, almost catching him by surprise.

"I appreciate it. I can't seem to find anyone to talk with."

As soon as he uttered the words, he spared himself a wry smile.

"She is just a kid after all, isn't she?" He thought to himself.

His embarrassment must have been evident on his face. The girl appeared to have laughed, but in the blink of an eye her face resumed its normal repose as she looked him in the eye. To Kenneth, it felt as though this was the first time he'd ever been stared directly in the eyes by a woman when they met for the first time. To top it all off, the ever-changing, flickering range of expressions on the girl's face struck him.

"Would you mind if I sat here?"

All the passengers in the cabin were aware that the girl was the only one sitting in the row of three seats.

"If it's going to be long, I'd rather not..." she said bluntly.

"So it's alright if I make it short?"

"Well, let's say maybe, shall we?"

He found nothing remotely unpleasant about being told so in that manner.

"As you wish, I'll keep this short. My name is Kenneth Sleg. I'm with the Federation Forces." He introduced himself as he floated over and into the seat.

"My guess would be that you're a Captain, yes?"

Without any inclination of closing the laptop, she followed his movement with her translucent blue gaze.



"What're you reading?"

"A picture book. Here, have a look."

She turned the laptop towards him. Sleek movement of beautiful computer graphics filled the screen. Two rabbits chased a butterfly in an animated fairytale. Several lines of text were displayed beneath the images.

"That story is quite popular, isn't it?"

"It's a classic. I can't say if it's very popular, but if I like something, I'll watch it no matter what."

"Hmph."

Before Kenneth could express his admiration, she switched to the next screen.

"Look, it's cute, isn't it?"

The screen was alive with animation. A rabbit and fox bounced their way around and around the border while in the center, a rabbit caught in a cage of petals was crying a fountain of tears.

"There's quite a bit going on, that's for sure."

As Kenneth was staring at the screen, the young woman shifted to a completely different subject.

"Seeing that you're a soldier, there's something I'd like to ask you. What do you think of Mufti Navue Erin?"

"Ah, well..."

Taken completely off guard, Kenneth briefly glanced into the young woman's eyes. The way she had shifted gears in mid-sentence and spoke what was on her mind revealed an inner strength to her that was completely at odds with her outward appearance.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, flustered.

Though he had every intention of asking in a calm and composed manner, that name and its connection to his current reasons for heading Earth side only served to expose his agitation.

"No reason in particular. I was just wondering. I mean, here we are conversing with one another much like passing strangers do..."

She laughed after using such an awkward analogy. As far as her bluntness was concerned, nothing changed. He found her lack of equivocating refreshing.

"What's so funny?"

"Well, I mean, you are heading to earth to wipe out Mufti, aren't you?"

Kenneth couldn't help but feel that there was something unusual about the young woman's insight into his position as she engaged him with her amusing verbal jousting.

"You're..."

"My name is Gigi Andalusia. I'd prefer it if you addressed me properly..."

"Ah, my apologies. It's not my intention to question your suppositions regarding me."

In the face of his apparent discomfort, Gigi maintained her faint

smile. She did have a small measure of sympathy for his apparent bewilderment.

"Don't laugh at me. I accept that I am an individual who can be overly emotional but, to have my shortcomings so easily pointed out by someone as young as you is, well, a considerable shock to me."

During his lengthy explanation, the girl seemed to have forgotten all about him, going back to staring at the pictures dancing across her laptop's screen. Yet the moment he finished, she glanced back up at him.

"So, what about the answer to my question?" she pressed.

Sensing the meaning in the glint of her eye, he blurted out a reply unbecoming of a man his age.

"Mufti... he's, well, a dangerous individual. He's someone who presents a threat to the order of the Earth Federation government."

"Such a formal answer. The world seems to be quite fond of Mufti. There's a plethora of special programs on TV with people wondering 'is Mufti Amuro Ray' or 'is he Char Aznable come back to life' or whether he'll do everything that people wish for."

Forgetting the computer, Gigi stretched her upper body, letting the unit float away. Kenneth reached out a hand and stopped the free-floating device and pushed it back towards her.

"Oh, thank you."

Pulling the laptop back onto her knees, she appeared to forget all about her question and started staring back at the pictures on the screen again.

"That's overkill, don't you think? After assassinating all the important figures in the Federation government, a policy should be enacted to cleanse the Earth by making everyone leave it. That's Mufti's declaration. Don't you think it's rather childish?"

Kenneth spoke with a newfound confidence, one he thought sufficient to stand up to the young girl's words; however, her response was simple: "Sometimes a child's logic is the correct one."

"You haven't given this enough thought. The world simply doesn't work as easily as that."

"Right... I understand adult logic, but... take high society for example. Are they really so high and mighty?"

As if to bring an end to their discussion, Gigi leaned in close to him, her voice almost in a whisper.

"I see your point... There's corruption, favoritism as well... But one can't really maintain a spotless integrity now can they? "

"What are your thoughts on that?"

He could see the shine in her eyes. Yet, almost as a reflex, he let the words slip out.

"Grease the wheels of society, perhaps?"

"Nothing but riddles from you, as usual."

Kenneth had no reply to the young girl and her sudden about face of anger. He was keenly aware that he had offered nothing but

trite arguments for their little exchange.

"However, there is something I'd like to correct you on. Although you say they've appeared to assassinate key government officials, would using mobile suits be considered assassination?"

"Not at all... it's an indiscriminate attack."

"I beg to differ. It's not indiscriminate if they're targeting only Earth Federation cabinet members and those who are in important positions. Mufti has clearly identified their targets, haven't they?"

Kenneth had nothing, not even a whimper.

Again, Gigi placed the laptop on her lap with both hands and changed the display.

Kenneth took this to mean Gigi's "few minutes" were over.

"Sorry, but although my time seems to be up, I wanted to ask you of your opinion on them."

"I think it's cute." She said, tilting her face sideways before immediately looking back at the screen.

"You're saying that the organization calling itself Mufti Navue Erin is cute?"

"Yes, it's a blend of Sudanese, Arabic and Old Irish. It's not a name at all, it's an awful hodgepodge." She said as if reciting it, her eyes never leaving the display.

"Hahaha, I suppose so..."

Although he felt like asking her a little more about what she thought, he sensed her aversion and floated away from the seat. He floated past the young man with a studious look to him and as he slid back into his own seat he glanced over at him.

"What's with this guy?" he thought, *"Is he a hunchback or something?"*

CHAPTER.2

LOUNGE

It was time for the last meal of the flight, as the full vestige of the Earth was no longer visible from the windows of the shuttle.

As the commotion came to an end, Gigi Andalusia floated her way towards the lounge at the rear of the cabin.

"..."

The young man seated next to Kenneth glanced over at the girl as if to make eye contact, but didn't feign as much interest in her as the other men did.

"...?"

That fact alone likely attracted her attention. She turned back towards the boy as she approached the hatch connecting the cabin to the lounge, much to the chagrin of many of the cabinet member's spouses.

The wives of the older men followed her with their scornful, prying eyes.

"Those are adults for you..."

As Gigi looked at the young man, she swallowed her urge to spit at them for their crude and opinionated glares.

Gigi was well aware of her position. The truth was, she felt intense gratification in having herself in this kind of situation.

"*Your husbands will all come to the lounge anyways...*" she thought as she floated towards the computer game area inside the lounge. It didn't take long for the cabin to become just as she had imagined.

One by one, the Federation cabinet ministers left their seats and headed for the lounge. Their wives, meanwhile, quietly gathered in the center of the cabin and boisterously gossiped about Gigi.

The wives usually weren't entertained by such impolite subject

matter, however, they needed an outlet for frustrations, having become worn out from being crammed into a sealed room under zero gravity.

"Isn't that girl's name a little lewd? I just wonder..."

"You know, I've thought that for a long time. The issue of why men chase after young and immature girls is one of those eternal philosophical problems."

"Are they trying to be modest just because we're around? I wonder about their nerves, you know? I hope I'm not being rude in saying so."

"Maybe it's because we're here or maybe they're just getting old and don't know what they're doing anymore, you know?"

The young man sitting in the aisle seat across from Kenneth quietly got up. He felt it was best to leave his seat for a little while, having stifled his laughter over the wives conversations.

He was wearing a gray jacket with a checkered pattern shirt in the same color, a loosely tied necktie with a pair of nicely matching, well-worn jeans. Amongst those in the cabin, however, he seemed a bit underdressed. Nonetheless, his refined facial features made him look appropriately fitting.

Due to the dark green velvet walls, the dim lighting of the lounge created a calm, elegant atmosphere. The ceiling, with its faux wooden beam accents, made it feel as though it wasn't a zero gravity environment.

"How extravagant," he said sighing as he went up to the counter to the left of the entrance.

"What can I get for you?" asked the bartender 30-something year old bartender in a businesslike tone as he sized up the young man's age.

"Would you clock me if I told you warm milk?"

"No, not at all. Is that what you really want?"

"No, my bad. I'll take a Wild Turkey on the rocks."

"Coming right up," replied the bartender, giving him a faint smile. Though primarily the ship's purser, he was working behind the counter this time.

"Well, well now. Her companions are all the Federation government cabinet ministers."

The young boy smirked from the corner of the lounge as he looked over at Gigi surrounded by the cabinet ministers. One sixth of the chief members of the Earth Federation Government Central Assembly were gathered over there. Although there were several civilians on board the *Haunzen* as well, seeing the cabinet ministers heading for the lounge made them hesitate in following suit.

"So then, Miss Gigi... Your views are anti-Federation?"

"Well, I wonder about that. They're just a typical girl's view. Still, they're not all thoughtless ones. Public consensus does at times reflect the truth. This is a historical fact."

The smile on the young man's slender face never vanished as he picked up on Gigi's naive logic.

The bartender placed a glass with a straw in front of the young man.

"Thanks. I'm guessing working on a ship like this is difficult, huh?"

"You betcha. There's too many bigshots."

"I feel ya there. No time to relax." The young man said sympathetically as he took a drink from the glass with the straw.

"Still, it's nice to be able to be on board, isn't it?" asked the bartender as he compared the boy and Gigi's gathering.

"I wouldn't say that. I can't exactly boast about it to others. I'm only on here because of my father."

The boy appeared to be telling the truth.

"Still, that's something. You get to go down to Earth."

"You're right about that. I'm in a good position, so I'm not about to start complaining."

Eventually, the bartender became more talkative with the young man as they were closer in age.

"So why are you going down to Earth?"

"I'm a candidate for a biological observer position. But, I'm still in training..."

"That's quite a privileged job! You can walk around on Earth with no fear or hesitation!"

"You're right. It's quite the privilege." replied the boy, giving him a wide grin. His smile was warm and made people like him.

The vacant seats around Gigi and the cabinet ministers gathering are accentuated by scenes of the ocean and forests, protected onto scenic displays on both walls of the lounge.

"So the Earth Federation government is adamant about exterminating Mufti? Are they blissfully unaware of the claims the mass media is making that they're completely wrong?"

Gigi's sharp voice got the young man and the bartender to look over at the group again.

"Well, he is the mastermind of a group of assassins. The Federation government's stance is that he is subject to capital punishment. You are aware of this, are you not?"

"So then why is the mass media heralding what Mufti is doing?"

"That is nothing but a lie, Miss Gigi. It's fabrication by some underground press and tabloid publications."

"Are you sure about that? Even if that were the case, the news tickers, the graffiti, they're all saying, 'Mufti Erin is the Messiah!', 'The Second Coming of a Newtype', and 'Mufti will purify the Federation government!'. It's all over the colonies and the Moon."

"Well then, do we, as respectable cabinet members of the Earth Federation government, look like such bad people that we need to be killed like that?"

"And don't you think that maybe some of those who support Mufti

are wrong?" asked one of the cabinet members as he grew serious amidst Gigi's earnest protests. Although joking, he was trying to get Gigi to look at the nature of the fact.

"I'm asking because I don't know. You see?" Gigi asked, placing her hand on another cabinet member's knee.

"Take a look at that..." the bartender whispered to the young man.

"How could a girl like that get on this ship?" he asked in response.

"Probably somebody's mistress."

"At her age? She's not even twenty."

"Eh, probably. But, when you work on this ship it's not strange to meet someone like that."

"Even when she's not from a family worthy of boarding this ship?"

"You're right on the money. Oh, but please, don't tell anyone I told you this."

"You are the Purser after all. It's a hard job."

The young man laughed intentionally so the others wouldn't think they were talking secretively. The bartender went along and faked a laugh.

Afterwards, the two exchanged small talk as another member of the staff entered the lounge from the hatch in the back.

"Mace Flower sure takes her time in the cockpit." the bartender whispered to the young man after seeing the blond girl come in.

"So you finally decided to make your way down to the lounge?"

The blond girl flashed the young man a perfect smile with her full lips.

"Well, unlike ordinary people, a person of social standing just can't relax in a place like this."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"But, that's not what it looks like," the blond girl complimented, took a drink of water, and said,

"It's about that time," the bartender nodded, looking down at the clock beneath the counter.

CHAPTER.3

KENNETH

"Are you awake, sir?"

Mace Flower came around Kenneth Sleg's seat and handed him a hot towel with tongs.

"Oh, thank you."

"Would you like a snack or a beverage?"

Kenneth wiped off his face with the towel,

"How about a bourbon on the rocks to wake me up?"

Giving him a faint smile, the blond turned around and floated into the lounge.

Kenneth picked up and folded the blanket clumped at the bottom of his feet. He jammed it into the space under the seat in front of him and took a moment to appreciate the earth's vivid blue sky and clouds through the window.

"What's the best word to describe it...? Treacherous?"

Just as Kenneth was starting to think about Gigi,

"Here you are, sir."

Mace brought him a glass with a straw in it. Kenneth thanked her, and as he was handed over the glass, he started to snicker.

"What's so funny, sir?"

Mace asked while giving a quick glance at his chest.

"Oh, it's nothing. I was just getting ahead of myself for a moment."

Kenneth had the cold hearted veteran's face in moments like this.

"Is that so?"

"I just realized I do like girls like you after all."

"Whatever do you mean by that?"

"Well I will not go too much into details for you might mistake me for a racist or some sort, but I came to a conclusion that every blond is different."

"I see. That is definitely complex."

The blond shrugged her shoulders in an animated fashion and gave him a faint smile with her lips glowing in red.

Kenneth's ex-wife was one controlling blond white woman: she would force him to say I love you constantly and never forgot to remind him that attending his child's sports meets was a father's undebatable responsibility. There were many occasions where he just wanted to tell her off and say he was a pilot before anything else. They ended up getting divorced in the end, but Kenneth still liked blond white women nonetheless.

Even though it may seem like it, it was not about race. It may exist in the core of the concept, but for Kenneth, it was more than just about a racial prejudice; it was more of a personal preference for him.

The reason why Kenneth was able to like a girl named Gigi Andalusia was not because of sentimental reasons but her existence itself. It was both rational and intuitive at the same time; it was not physiological.

He felt pressured just by knowing that she exists.

If it was not a power of presence, what else would it be?

What's more, Gigi's presence was so powerful, he would find it easier to put up with the below-average woman who would demand him to tell her I love you a million times.

"Hmm, talking about feelings is hard you know. That's because it's not conceptional. I mean, I've met all kinds of people and worked many different jobs. But what I just felt was I like girls of your proportions. That how I am feeling right now."

"Is that how a man entering middle-age flirts?"

"I don't mind if I came out that way, Miss..."

Kenneth held his breath, feeling a little embarrassed about not knowing the blonde's name. She had a name tag on her chest when she was wearing a stewardess uniform, but she no longer had it now that she was serving as a flight companion.

"...Mace Flower."

"Flour?"

"No, F-l-o-w-e-r."

"Where are you from?"

"You sound like the police. That's why I don't like working on this ship. Do you visit Earth often?"

"Not so much. This time, I am on vacation half the time. Can't you take a break after this?"

Kenneth lied.

"Why, are you asking me out? I will be doing some gardening since I have a room in Hong Kong, which is our landing point."

"Well, that's rich. Which side are you from?"

"I hate space... I seem to feel weak magnetism like gravity, and I prefer that way. "

Whatever her words meant, Kenneth was in a moment of relief for he liked her more than Gigi.

"I would like to see you again, if you have some time."

"Sure... Is it hard getting old?"

Mace switched subjects while leaning against a seat, but Kenneth didn't mind. She needed some time to think as well.

He took a sip out of the straw and answered, "Not really".

"Why is that?"

"Well, for one thing, I no longer get nervous when talking to a beautiful girl like you. When I was a teenager, I would choke, my chest was always tingling, and wasn't able to do anything... This is certainly better than that. "

"But I would rather you got nervous."

"That's because you still haven't forgot about how you felt when you first fell in love. But you already know that is not realistic."

"Hahaha. You saw right through me, sir."

Mace gave Kenneth the I'll take off look as the young man came out of the hatch and she passed by him.

"I am sorry to disturb you."

The young man talked to Kenneth for the first time.

"You're fine."

Kenneth had no idea who it was, but he kept on sipping on the bourbon and looking out at the Earth drifting beneath the window.

As soon as the young man next to him started gazing at his laptop, all of the passengers in the lounge started moving into the cabin.

Kenneth stared at Gigi Andalusia over the seat as she was escorted into the cabin by the gentlemen.

"I almost want to agree with Mufti after seeing those cocky cabinet ministers."

Kenneth, again, thought of the relationship between the cabinet ministers and Mufti. He is a soldier because he knows adults can't escape from regulations and restrictions of organizations.

"I would have befriended Mufti if I ever chose to live like them."

He could feel that way probably because he was somewhat proud of who he was.

However, normally, people are barely getting by and once they find a way to make the ends meet, they cling to it for the rest of their lives.

Normal people aren't usually able to have any connections with the Earth Federation Government's cabinet ministers or high officials, and they are too busy living their lives to think about some vague entity like the government.

The same goes for Kenneth. He is only in the army because he like the mobile suits. He gets to make a living doing what he likes and as a result, he doesn't hate his life for what it is.

The humanoid weapon known as a mobile suit is the one thing he can truly have feelings toward. So much so that while he was fighting

on the frontline as a pilot inside of a mobile suit during "Char's Rebellion," he felt something akin to an ecstasy.

Mobile suits were always as honest to him as he was to them. They were the one thing that never betrayed him. That is why Kenneth was able to survive to this day.

"I was being overly sentimental thanks to Gigi, but women have been nothing but an obstruction in my life." he thought.

CHAPTER.4

HIJACK

The *Haunzen* slowed its orbit, decelerating so fast it seemed to jump into the upper atmosphere. The shuttle slowly made its decent into the thick atmosphere.

It was not as rough as flight in the days before the space colony era, but all the same, the passengers were strapped into their seats and had to endure a fair amount of vibration.

Humans who live in space, Spacenoids, who were used to space flight, hated flying through atmosphere. Their comfort for space flight only increased their anxiety for flying through air.

"It's because that thing they call 'air' is flowing. It's much worse than in space."

That was Kenneth's, and the other pro pilots', evaluation of flight on Earth.

As long as there were no obstacles, the uniform vacuum of space promised stable flight. To space pilots, that was the central principle of spaceflight.

Kenneth squinted at the blue sea the thousand meters below. He guessed at the origin of the vibration in the fuselage.

If he didn't think of anything the vibration would just continue to gnaw at him until it was unbearable.

"... ?"

"It looks like two strange objects are flying," he thought. They slid from below, flowing upward.

"Looks like an older craft."

That was all he had in mind the moment something with the same silhouette cut across his window. Kenneth had an uneasy feeling.

"Oh no!"

A slightly hysterical voice rose from ahead. It was that girl, Gigi's

voice.

"What?"

The young man asked from across an empty seat. That was the second time the young man called to Kenneth. He tightly gripped the computer terminal with both hands.

"Huh?"

Kenneth didn't understand the meaning of his question, or what Gigi said.

DWAA!

Suddenly a violent vibration shook the cabin.

"Aaiieeee!"

"Ooh!?"

The adults screamed.

As Kenneth's seatbelt dug into his thigh he saw one of the ministers wives body crash into the ceiling and fall back down.

"A shockwave!?"

Kenneth guessed that the *Haunzen* was rocked by the supersonic wave created by the unknown craft racing by. The vibration subsided but there was no sign that things would quiet down.

"What!?"

"Stand fast!"

As voices rose from the center of the cabin, Kenneth tried to see what was happening outside. He couldn't spot any aircraft out of the narrow ship-side windows.

"It looked like a Base Jabber Type frame, but..."

"Where is that ship from?"

The young man in the next seat asked.

"I don't know but, here it comes!"

Another ship swept by from the front-diagonal to the back; there was nothing written on its flat Base Jabber type hull that would indicate where it was from. The thickly painted dark green fuselage was covered in rust. The rough treatment of the craft was obvious—the front glass looked like it had never been cleaned.

"Shockwave incoming!"

Kenneth shouted into the cabin.

"What!?"

"It was a near miss, but it looks like they noticed and are coming back."

"They noticed?"

The young man moved to the seat next to Kenneth.

"Purser, what is the situation!"

Kenneth turned to the back of the cabin, shifting to a military tone.

"Uh..."

The young man leaned forward to the window and saw part of a ship disappear to the rear of the *Haunzen*.

CRASH! CRAAASH!

As the *Haunzen* was tossed by the shockwave—up and down, left and right—Kenneth stretched out both arms, grabbed a seat, and braced himself.

Another passenger's body, a cabinet minister, bounced off the ceiling.

"Hold that lady down!"

Kenneth's order was drowned out by the screams of middle-aged women. The lady's body that had crashed into the ceiling floated up, and crashed down again.

"Purser! Get into the cockpit!"

"Captain Kenneth!"

The young bartender exited the hatch from the lounge, trying to gain control, when suddenly he grabbed the intercom on the wall.

CRASH!

There was another crash, but Kenneth held onto to the seat and stopped himself from flying—the product of his considerable military training.

The purser, on the other hand, crashed into the ceiling, ripping the intercom cord out of the wall.

"Ooahh!"

His voice, a mixture of a scream and a moan, filled the cabin.

"Where is that craft from?"

The young man slid into the seat next to Kenneth, looked out the window, and caught a glance of the wing of the unknown ship before it once again hid behind the *Haunzen*.

"It's a hijack. It's not clear what their intention is yet, but they are not trying to shoot us down. Relax."

An announcement from the captain of the *Haunzen* played, then stopped.

"...?"

The young man made an enigmatic expression and saw the purser stand up. He watched the blond girl, stiff faced, rush into the passage with a first-aid kit to help the woman who crashed into the ceiling.

"The voice before must have been that girl, Gigi, right?"

The young man looked at Gigi's seat but he saw nothing there but an empty seatbelt, still fastened.

The young man quickly moved to his original seat and put on his seatbelt. He stared at the blond girl crouching in the corridor attempting to push the lady's round legs, which were protruding from an armrest, into to a seat.

Kenneth, who was by the hatch connecting to the cockpit at the front, couldn't see it.

"..."

CRASH!

The impact this time was biggest, and what was worse, the longest.

"Aah!"

The blond girl in Hathaway's field of vision floated high in the wide corridor and then crashed down on the ceiling, and then into the next seat backing. She dropped, landing on her side.

"Ung...!"

The blond girl shrank down and then bounced, seat to seat, toward the young man.

The young man raised his arms and caught the girl's body, her stomach covering his face.

"Are you okay?!"

"I... I think so..."

"It's probably better if you sit."

The young man lowered Mace Flower into the chair to the right of his.

"Oof..."

Mace, gasping deeply, sat in the seat next to his—her hair was all over the place, and her cheeks had lost their color.

"Seatbelt..."

"That's right. Yeah... Thanks."

Mace used both hand to check her body to see if there was anything wrong.

"Looks like I just got boxed around."

As Mace rested her head on the seatback, she glanced at the young man, but he did not have time to return the glance.

"What is that...? That sound..."

The young man noticed the sound coming from the rear of the cabin.

A clattering sound of metal on metal seemed to start around the time he laid Mace's body in the seat next to his.

"The rear airlock?"

Mace asked, not even able to raise her head from the seatback.

"Are you kidding me? Those Mufti bastards!"

It was Kenneth.

He leapt through the hatch connected to the cockpit, pistol in hand, and ran toward the lounge.

"Captain, wait."

"Cabinet Minister Einstein! It's Mufti Erin. They're trying to board the ship."

The cabinet minister sitting in a seat behind the young man stopped Kenneth.

"If that is true, throw your gun away. The *Haunzen* has too many cabinet ministers aboard."

The cabinet minister grabbed Captain Kenneth by the wrist.

As the young man listened to their conversation he took off his seatbelt.

"Mufti is trying to seize the *Haunzen*, of all things."

Kenneth shook free of the cabinet minister's hand and walked

past Hathaway toward the lounge.

"At this high altitude? Ridiculous!"

"Our altitude is below six thousand meters. Besides, this spaceship has a perfect airlock so it has no effect on the cabin. They can get in."

Kenneth's voice moved behind Hathaway.

"That is correct. Captain Kenneth! Put down your gun and throw it here! Slide it across the floor!"

That voice seemed to come from the direction of the lounge.

"Don't look."

The young man said, sensing Mace's head moving next to him.

"It's better not to make eye contact with hijackers."

To the young man's side, he could see Kenneth starting to retreat to the cockpit.

"The gun! Pass it here!"

The voice giving that order was slightly muffled. Next to the young man, Kenneth lowered the gun and slid it across the floor.

The young man, not moving his head, watched the movement of Kenneth's arm and stern face. He tried to predict the hijacker's next move.

The animal-like eye moments of the young man noticed Kenneth backing away.

"... ?"

Kenneth raised his hands and backed away further.

"Well done, Captain."

The hijacker picked up Kenneth's pistol and tucked it under his ammunition belt. He held a submachine gun in this right hand, pointing it at Kenneth.

"Earth Federation cabinet ministers, ladies and gentleman: I am Mufti Erin."

The reason the voice of the man who made that declaration was muffled was shown by what he was wearing on his face: a pumpkin mask, like one you would wear at Halloween.

CHAPTER.5

HATHAWAY

The man in the pumpkin mask moved forward, calmly observing the seats on both sides. Kenneth froze, pressing his back up against the hatch that led to the cockpit. The man in the pumpkin mask came up next to the young man and Mace Flower, the blond girl next to him.

A man in a pirate mask with an eye patch followed the pumpkin mask. Walking up to Kenneth, he opened the hatch to the cockpit.

Both men wore leather jackets and jeans. Sturdy weapon belts were fastened around their waists, complete with hand grenades.

The grips of the pistols on their belts shone with a well-worn luster. These were professionals.

"Cabinet ministers and their wives, my apologies, but I believe you already know how you will be treated. Sit now, Captain!"

Forcing Captain Kenneth to sit down on a front row seat in the cabin, the pumpkin mask then stood with his back facing the hatch to the cockpit that the eyepatch man had opened.

"This operation is different from the ones in the past... Our objective is not take your lives at any cost. There are limits to such indiscriminate attacks. At times, we resistance forces need money. This operation is about getting that money. In exchange for your lives, we will acquire military funds from the Earth Federation government. If we succeed, all of you will be released. As for the civilians, they too will be released with the appropriate ransom payment."

The open mouth of the pumpkin mask did not muffle the man's voice too much, but the Halloween mask itself was quite an effective tool of intimidation.

What seemed to be another one of their companions could be heard entering from the back of the cabin. Hathaway heard the

purser groan as he was hit.

It seemed that the man in a witch mask and the pirate had proceeded to the cockpit and opened the door.

The pumpkin masked man made no move to close the half-open door in front of him, holding it open with his body.

Each man held a lightweight machine gun. This was to avoid damaging the ship in the close confines of the cabin.

"Spare my life! Please!"

A scream rose from among the old women.

"Don't scream! It's annoying!"

Hearing the pumpkin mask's threatening voice, silence overtook the cabin.

"Very good... Now, so long as things remain as they are, all of you will be saved. We are currently organizing an army at a certain location in order oppose the Earth Federation Forces. To do that, we need money. I ask for your cooperation in order to avoid useless bloodshed... PURSER!"

"Y-Yes. Here is the list."

The purser handed the file panel to the man in the pumpkin mask. Kenneth caught sight of the bruise on his right cheek.

"Hmph...sit down over there."

Taking the file, pumpkin mask sat the purser down on the seat in front of him and glanced at the file.

"Alright, I will now conduct roll call. My apologies to you, esteemed cabinet ministers, but be good little grade school students and raise your hands when called."

Staring out from the holes in his mask, the man looked out over the entire cabin, calling out names from the list.

The wives were also forced to raise their hands and reply.

Only half a year since Mufti's activities had come to the forefront, it was strange for so many members of the Earth Federation government's Central Council of Ministers to be gathered in a single place.

However, that the operations of the Haunzen were even kept from the military was just a cover up. The fact that Mufti had yet to set hands this ship was surely the reason things had ended up this way.

"How did you find out about this ship?"

One cabinet minister spoke up before the man in the pumpkin mask had finished his roll call.

"With the exception of answering our commands, questions aren't necessary!"

"But, you see... we are in a position to inquire about your organization's secrets..."

The calm, overly familiar questioning the old fox of a minister spelled out was more than enough to rub the already-nervous hijacker the wrong way.

"You sure can talk!"

The man in the pumpkin mask let out a short burst from his machine gun, spraying shell casings around the cabin. It happened in an instant.

"Ahhhh!"

One of the wives let out a scream and stood up. Her right cheek and shoulder were stained red with blood. After taking a step into the aisle, she fainted, body crumpling down onto the opposite row of seats.

"What happened?!"

The man with the witch mask jumped out from the cockpit and looked over at the pumpkin mask.

"An execution. Don't worry about it. Continue contacting Hong Kong. We must communicate our situation and demands to the Federation government as soon as possible."

"Gotcha."

"Listen up, you dogs! This is the work of Mufti Erin. I warned you not to forget about that! And, don't stand! Roll call isn't over! I'm am prepared to execute another one or two of you!"

Hearing the pumpkin mask's angry voice, the witch mask returned to the cockpit.

The pumpkin mask returned his gaze to the list.

"Gigi Andalusia."

"Here..." A meek reply rose from among the seats.

"You're rather young, aren't you? What are you doing on this ship?"

The man with the pumpkin mask who repeatedly shouted the name of Mufti seemed to stare at Gigi's seat.

"I had a connection."

"I'll ask you about that matter later. Hathaway Noa..."

"Here..."

The young man sitting next to the blonde woman Mace Flower raised his hand in reply.

"Hathaway Noa...? You?"

"Yes..."

The young man met the man's gaze and nodded.

"Hathaway...you mean that Hathaway?"

"It's probably just as you imagined."

The young man replied without hesitation.

"I see... I heard you were the leader of an anti-military and anti-ideology group, but wh...no, never mind. We'll talk later. Right now you'll have to become one of the hostages."

The pumpkin mask's last words were filled with good will.

Yet, nothing in the young man's speech or behavior showed that he had put down his guard. Rather, his entire body was drawn tight, chin drawn in.

Mace Flower did not miss this. Still moaning from the pain in her side, she saw the repeated squeezing of the young man's hands,

clasped and resting on his knees.

"Tie both of Captain Kenneth's hands." the man in the pumpkin mask ordered to the man with the pirate mask who was guarding the hatch to the lounge.

"Yes, sir!"

The man with the pirate mask replied curtly, in military fashion.

"Twenty-two passengers and five crew members. One dead. Somebody, anybody, will need to remove the corpse. Hop to it."

Nobody in the cabin replied.

"He's one of your own, isn't he? This is the Minister of Health and Care who died. Christ!"

One man raised his hand in response to the pumpkin's demand. It was Hathaway Noa.

"Can you do it?"

"I saw a lot of heavy corpses in the last war..."

"Hmm... I guess the elderly shouldn't be counted. Purser, help Hathaway out."

"R-right!"

The purser stood up with a meek reply.

Hathaway walked around in front of the Purser and looked over at the the seat next to the woman who had fainted.

"You went and did it..."

The seat was stained with blood and brain matter. The minister's head had been blown apart by three shots to the face. Hathaway's brow furrowed.

"I had no choice. That was the situation. You saw," said pumpkin masked man from behind Hathaway.

Hathaway felt the weakness in his reply. Yet, he also knew to avoid rash actions in an uncertain situation with multiple enemies.

"I need a blanket, Purser."

After his curt words to the purser, Hathaway looked over sympathetically at another cabinet minister in the same aisle. His eyes were closed and he was looking up at the ceiling.

"I want to move the minister. Do you mind?" asked Hathaway. He looked over at the man in the pumpkin mask.

"Hey! Minister of Science and Technology! Stand up. You're in the way!"

The minister who had been looking up at the ceiling stood up hurriedly and scaled the seat in front of him. He sat down in the seat next to Gigi.

Hathaway and the purser then began the most repulsive job in that cabin.

As they were finishing up, the minister's wife came to her senses, latched on to the blanketed body and began to bawl.

Hathaway gathered up the extra blankets and handed them over to the purser. He heard the "Tch!" of the man with the pumpkin mask clicking his tongue.

"Madam, it's better if you don't make any sound. You'll be killed."

The purser put the blankets handed to him by Hathaway on the aisle seat behind him.

"If my husband ended up like this, then I want to to be killed too!"

The woman continued to cry and howl, body crumpled in a fetal position.

Just as Hathaway was thinking that the situation took a turn for the worse, the man in the pumpkin mask pushed him from behind.

"Ya know, we really don't like it when people speak figuratively."

The head of the machine gone had already gone up to the woman's head as she spoke. There was a muffled gurgle.

Again, the cabin fell into silence.

"You son of a bitch!"

Hathaway twisted around and glared up at the man in the mask.

"What?!"

The man drew back reflexively and pointed his gun at Hathaway.

"Why don't you kill those guys who lie about being Mufti?"

The girl's words hit the man in the pumpkin mask and Hathaway like a slap to the face.

"What?"

Right as the masked man let down his guard, Hathaway's uppercut sliced into his chin. The man with the pirate mask behind him in the passage aimed his gun.

Twisting his body, Hathaway threw the blankets the purser had placed on the aisle seat at the man with the pirate mask and rolled into the passageway.

He could hear the sound of the pirate mask's machine gun tearing through the blankets, but that was above him.

In an instant, Hathaway's legs swept his feet out from under him, and, staring up at the gun pointed down at him, Hathaway redirected his body to the right of its aim.

Using two seats at his side as support, Hathaway drove his foot into the pirate man's face and used his heel to crush the right wrist holding the machine gun.

Behind Hathaway, the man in the pumpkin mask was trying to get up, but Captain Kenneth hurled himself on him, falling to the floor while trying to bury the machine gun with his side.

Hathaway tore the gun from the pirate mask's hands, pointing it up over Captain Kenneth and the pumpkin masked man, towards the cockpit hatch.

"Another execution?"

At the same instant that the witch masked man in the cockpit turned, Hathaway pulled the trigger.

Even as the the witch mask's body crumbled, he tried to aim his gun. Hathaway rushed forward, entering the cockpit to knock his machine gun down.

When their eyes last met, there was about two feet between



Hathaway and the masked man. Hathaway struck the muzzle of the man's gun with his own. That single action stole his enemy's will to fight.

Hathaway pressed the head of his machine gun firmly into the right side of the man's chest.

"Hands up! Tell your allied ship to withdraw after you've finished taking control of this ship."

"It's already gone," replied the man. His English was broken.

Captain Kenneth, hands still tied, peeked into the cockpit holding a machine gun.

"Is it over?"

"...!"

Hathaway shot a look to the Captain to check the exterior as he removed the gun belt from the man's shoulder.

"I thought so. A Base Jabber. They used something the military disposed of?"

It was the pilot's voice.

"Any others?" asked Hathaway, looking over at Kenneth.

"There were only four. I checked from the cockpit when they docked."

"How?"

"They said so when they boarded. That sent me into a rage."

As he spoke, Kenneth took the fruit knife the purser had brought him and cut the bindings on his wrists.

The copilot drew out some extra cord from the cockpit and tied the hands of the man Hathaway was restraining.

"In-flight inspection. Hurry," commanded the pilot to the purser.

"Well, that went well. What were you planning on doing if you failed?"

"Nothing. It was either fall into the ocean together or I would end up like the Minister of Health and Care."

Feeling the cold sweat trickle down his armpits, Hathaway finally let out a sigh of relief.

"Anyway, let's tie this guy up in the lounge."

Shouldering the machine gun, Kenneth removed the man's eyepatch mask and pushed him into the cabin.

Still thinking that he should at least stay alert until things had settled down, Hathaway followed Kenneth out and watched over as the purser took the civilian passengers and the last hijacker into the lounge.

"Captain! And...Hathaway Noa, was it? I am grateful."

The girl in the front seat, Gigi Andalusia, met Hathaway's eyes and let out a faint smile.

Seeing the girl's smile, Hathaway remembered that things had gone well thanks to her words.

"...?"

Hathaway wondered how the girl knew that the hijackers were

just using Mufti Erin's name.

The men shouldn't have given anything away.

Yet, Gigi Andalusia had definitely shouted that those men were not with Mufti. Because of that, things went well. But, was there some meaning behind it?

This was the problem that bothered Hathaway.

CHAPTER.6

LANDING GROUND

The *Haunzen* must have been damaged when coming into contact with the hijacker's Base Jabber.

When the captain announced a change in location for their landing, the cabin was noisy. But as the strange vibrations continued, the noise died down and a gloomy air of unease permeated the cabin.

"We've contacted Davao. We will land at their airport in twenty minutes."

After countless broadcasts, the captain had finally revealed the landing point.

"Well, well... if it isn't our future base."

Kenneth's words to Hathaway Noa were again filled with the comradery of a shared job well done.

"Why here? It's farther away than Hong Kong..."

"Yeah... something is wrong with the *Haunzen*'s tail fin."

Kenneth checked the belt of his life-jacket while murmuring to Hathaway.

"We can only go forward and are drifting to the right?"

"That's right."

Attempting a wink, Kenneth then closed his eyes, pressing his head up against the back of his seat.

"Noa m'boy..."

One of the cabinet ministers across the aisle was reaching out, poking Hathaway with his elbow.

"Yes...?"

It was Mr. McGovern, the Minister of Culture and Education Promotion.

"You piloted a mobile suit during Char's Rebellion, didn't you? Is

the *Haunzen* okay?"

The minister's wife sitting on his other side was also looking at Hathaway with a worried expression. She did not recognize her husband's great leap in logic.

"I don't know anything about flying machines right now. Especially spaceships... but, we chose Davao, so it should be okay."

"Oh. I guess you're right..."

"I'm also praying to God..."

"Ahh, I see..."

Just as the Captain had said, the *Haunzen* was heading for the giant new landing strip west of Davao. Bright shouts and cheers rose up from the cabin.

"Well, things are easier for me because we don't have to be on the move anymore."

Kenneth grinned over at Hathaway, removing his life-jacket.

"This airport, was it always this big?"

Hathaway tried to look out the window at the airport, but Kenneth spread his arms over the window, hiding it.

"Actually, this isn't something I can show to civilians."

"But you're also using it for civilian flights, right?"

"Yes we are. Unfortunately, it doesn't just belong to the Federation Forces."

Kenneth laughed, "Besides, you can see all you want after we get off the *Haunzen*."

The *Haunzen* had started to head for the airport apron. Kenneth stood up and entered the cockpit.

"Still, now that we've landed in a place like this, what are we going to do next for transportation?!"

"Wasn't this an inconvenient location?"

Disgruntled complaints rose up from among the ministers. It was as if they'd forgotten the nervousness from moments before.

"No, no. This airport is closer to Adelaide. Gentlemen. Let's take the time to enjoy the beautiful tropical air. A flight to Adelaide will be prepared for you immediately."

The Minister of Interior Space Inspection in the front row spoke out with an optimistic address, earning applause from the other ministers. It was like he had already forgotten of his comrade's death.

Although they knew this was brought on by the relief from the threat of the hijackers, it was not a pretty scene for the onlooking civilians.

"How could you..."

Hathaway was stirred up, but he kept his mouth shut and stared out at the passing tropical scenery.

The *Haunzen* stopped on the apron in front of the airport's control tower. A short while later, a passenger walkway connected to the airlock.

The Mindanao island of Davao was originally an island with airport

access. The Earth Federation Forces had appropriated the facilities and was using it as an Air Force garrison base in the South Pacific region.

Hathaway moved to the lounge to check on the tied up prisoners.

"Wow, Noa m'boy, that was a nice bit of action there."

The bruise on the Purser's cheek was getting darker and darker.

"It wasn't nice at all. The aftertaste of violence is bitter...the wounds to the hijackers are pretty bad, right?"

"They won't die. And a doctor should be coming soon."

Hathaway loosened the prisoners' gags in fear that they were biting their tongues, but the trio appeared to be fine.

They still had life in them. They didn't seem to be soldiers, but their eyes shone with the confidence of purposeful action.

"Is your body okay?" asked Hathaway, seeing Mace Flower standing next to the hatch with her clothes unchanged.

"Yea...somehow."

Despite saying this, when Mace tried to reach her arms up to fix her hair, she crouched over in pain. It seemed her injury was bothering her.

The Purser went over to help Mace. Noticing the ministers coming down, he adjusted his collar and waited.

"Well well, Hathaway Noa. Thanks to you, we've been able to land at a friendly base. Thank you."

The ministers and their wives went up to Hathaway one after another, repeating derivatives of the same sentence. A breath of warm, slightly salty air floated off towards the lounge.

To the five senses accustomed to airtight spaces, that foreign air was quite refreshing.

This was especially so to Hathaway, who had gotten used to such air over the years. Breathing deeply in secret, he waved sociably at the ministers and the other guests as they left the ship.

"...?!"

Last among the passengers was Gigi Andalusia.

Their gazes met. Or rather, she stopped and waited until it happened.

"...?"

"Hm..."

Gigi gave a laugh, looking over with her clear blue eyes.

"What...?" asked Hathaway. But the voice wouldn't leave from his throat. In that second of hesitation, Gigi slipped passed and out over the walkway into the dense, tropical island air.

"My new subordinates are coming. Sorry."

Kenneth finally entered the lounge alongside the captain.

"Well, it seems that nothing is amiss..." said Hathaway, looking over the prisoners.

"Yea, it seems it's just like Gigi said. These guys aren't Mufti."

"You mean they're frauds?"

Hathaway pretended not to know. His circumstances made it that way.

"Well, we won't know until we look them up. As a possibility, they might be fragments of the Mufti army gathering at Owenberry.

"...? Mufti army?"

That news alone was a first to Hathaway. Although he was used to life on the southern islands, it wasn't as if he knew everything that was going on.

"I don't know the details myself."

"Owenberry?"

"It's a town in northern Australia... Seems there are several thousands of dissidents gathered there."

"Sir! Commander Kimberly is currently leading troops towards Owenberry."

"Wha--?"

An officer had cut between Hathaway and Kenneth for his report. Just finishing his dash, he stood there gasping for air.

"Sir! Lieutenant JG Ray Lagoid of the Kimberly Forces 5th Landing Squad."

"Ah. I'm Kenneth. I've just been appointed here."

Waiting for Kenneth to return a casual salute, Hathaway asked, "Um...can I get off?"

"Wait for me in the lobby. We need to get a statement from you, and we have to make arrangements for a hotel tonight too."

"Are these the new forces you'll be in charge of, Captain?"

"Mufti hunting is our job. I'm not gonna let the police complain. The Haunzen's operating company, Pan Space, landed here so it's in our jurisdiction.

"Really?"

"We've no choice, right?" said Kenneth clearly. He took a sullen look at the protesting captain.

"Captain! What is it you want us to do?!"

"Oh, Lieutenant. Good work. Take the hijackers calling themselves Mufti into custody. We're going to get them before police or the guys from the Investigation Department.

"Yes sir!"

Hathaway put their conversation behind him and waved over at Mace, who was sitting in last row of lounge seating. He then headed off of the walkway.

The weariness that filled his whole body spread a refreshing warmth over it. Letting this weariness emanate from his body, Kenneth vaguely saw plain-clothed police officers walking briskly towards the *Haunzen*.

Kenneth's words bothered Hathaway.

It seemed there was a Mufti army in Owenberry and Kimberly himself was heading there to clean things up. These two bits of information were not something Hathaway had imagined.

"What is this?"

"Ah-, your name!"

As Hathaway exited the walkway, several airport personnel, policemen and officers of the base were waiting for him.

"It's Hathaway Noa..."

"Oh, okay... please wait in the VIP room."

"It's this way."

A female employee with a body like a coiled spring stood out in front of Hathaway. From her appearance, there was no doubt she was from this island.

"Thanks."

The lobby was fortified by gun-wielding soldiers, and the civilian passengers were completely closed off.

The room on the other side of the thick mahogany door they were guided to was a wide space that was almost too gaudy in the way it was decorated.

One side was a giant glass window that faced the runway. A space the size of a gymnasium was lined with vermillion sofas and rosewood tables spaced wide enough so that you couldn't hear the conversations passing over.

"Where would the Chief of the Criminal Police Organization be?"

The question was from a middle-aged man in front of Hathaway. He was wearing glasses and accompanied by two subordinates. It seemed he was talking to his fellow companions in the room.

"Who are you?"

"I am with the Federation Bureau of Investigation. I want to set up a meeting to question the chief..."

"The chief is... ahh, yes. He's over there."

"I appreciate it."

The trio's clothes rippled like water as they ran between the relaxing ministers.

Watching this men unfit for the room move around, Hathaway walked towards the window as if drawn in by the sunlight.

"Well, the hero arrives."

"Hathaway Noa! I'd like to shake your hand. I heard you were a soldier when you were younger?"

"It was a pity that Hiram Messier died, but afterwards, when we were taken hostage, the Earth Federation government launched a huge assault. It wasn't just about my own life. I am grateful."

Having relaxed after being saved, the wives bubbled with conversation. One of them, old enough to be Hathaway's grandmother, embraced him and gave him a kiss.

"No, I just did what was right for any person."

Repeating such cliched phrases, he finally managed to sit down on a window-side sofa.

Just as he was thinking Gigi should be around, a companion dressed in a white blouse and a long black skirt that almost touched

the floor came to take drink orders. Her head bowed in an oriental style.

"Oh... I'll have a ginger ale."

"Right away."

Just as she went, the chief of the Criminal Police Organization came accompanied by the trio from the Bureau of Investigation.

"I believe haven't introduced myself because we weren't on the same ship. Hathaway Noa. I remember. Your father was Bright Noa of the Space Forces 13th Autonomous Corps and captain of the Ra Cailum. During Char's Rebellion, you piloted one of the military's mobile suit, right?"

"Not at all. I just stole one... I got out of it without being convicted because we won the war..."

"No no, it was quite the feat. I am Hundley Yeoksam of the Criminal Police Organization. I'll need you to accompany me to the investigation room for an interview, but we've been having a bit of a dispute with the Kimberly Forces... I want you to stay in Davao until tomorrow. Is that possible?"

"No problem. I'm going back to Menado, so I'll wait for my flight here."

"Menado... ? In Sulawesi?"

The question came from a man behind the chief wearing glasses.

"Yes, I'm currently training as a biological observer on the Minahassa Peninsula.

"Really...that professor? Amada Mansun?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Prepare a hotel room for him. The Kimberly Forces say they're going to stay here, but who cares. Find a different hotel."

"Of course."

"Our hotel should be prepared by the airline company. This and that are separate things."

"But, for questioning, now is okay too."

"We're done for today. Dismissed, dismissed. Your ladies are waiting for dinner overlooking the southern ocean's setting sun. You don't know their troubles, do you?"

The chief patted Hathaway's shoulder and returned cheerfully to their seats.

The companion who was waiting came and brought Hathaway's drink.

Before Hathaway could take even a moment's respite, the glasses-wearing man from the Bureau of Investigation returned, business card in hand.

"Director Geise H. Hugest?"

"I have a favor to ask. I want you keep this incident a secret from the general public. Alright?"

The way he talked was a bit irritating. He clearly didn't have anyone above him to report to.

“Of course, Director...”

“And also, the chief said that, but could you just tell me a little about the situation? Us higher-ups can’t be so laid back... If you would, please.”

The glasses-wearing man stood up before even hearing Hathaway’s reply. His behavior stunk of someone who didn’t think of ordinary humans as humans at all.

Slightly disgusted at the bureaucrat, Hathaway drank his ginger ale without the straw.

“...?”

Why didn’t they realize, though Hathaway.

The reason sat on a sofa across from the Hathaway’s glass. It was Gigi.

CHAPTER.7

WITH GIGI

Gigi had been watching Hathaway since he stood up. Her radiant, golden hair fluttered around her shoulders.

"So why did you laugh earlier?"

Hathaway felt relieved. He had asked her without much difficulty.

"No reason, really... You hate me, yet you were worried about me then."

Gigi's words had a hint of laughter.

"Those men on the shuttle were all talking to you. A young guy like me isn't on the same level, so I didn't talk to you. Besides, that's not the reason you laughed. You were thinking something else, weren't you?"

"Really? Was I?" Gigi motioned for Hathaway to sit down. Hathaway gave his thanks. Seeing her from the front for the first time, he thought she was beautiful.

"You're really quite beautiful."

"Thank you."

Gigi was used to such praise, yet there wasn't a trace of irony in her words.

"Really, you are..."

"Haha!"

Her laugh, full of affirmation and confidence, was also free of irony.

Hathaway did not actually know for sure what Gigi had been thinking when she laughed.

"How did figure out that the hijackers were pretending to be Mufti?"

He ended up asking a different question.

"A person's body language always shows it. Oh, and the reason I

laughed was because I realized they were just using Mufti's name."

Gigi sighed.

"Wha-...?"

Gigi leaned forward slightly. "Because I knew that name Mufti Nabiyyu Erin, also known as the title of "The Righteous Kind of Prophets," belongs to you, Hathaway Noa."

"Hahahaha! Can't you see I'm just your average guy?"

It seemed like Gigi had absolutely no interest in Hathaway. She openly turned her gaze to the window, staring out over the wide expanse of the airport.

With such a reaction, Hathaway could not find it in him to continue.

"..."

"*I should have brought my ginger ale,*" he thought. Gigi gave the silent Hathaway a sidelong glance.

"Honestly... I like that about you," she said.

"...?"

Hathaway rested his elbows on his knees and clasped his hands, looking up at Gigi.

"*This girl knows I'm lying...*"

To Hathaway, this meant that he must prepare himself for capture.

The Kimberly Forces were stationed at this very airport. They were a unit organized for the purpose of capturing and exterminating Mufti Erin.

As Kenneth had said, the commander until today, Captain Kimberly Heyman, was a incompetent opponent. His lack of ability was also the reason Mufti Erin had been able to move so freely these last six months. Even then, Kimberly was currently conducting an invasion of Australia. Kenneth would soon be commanding that force.

Commanders like Kenneth were truly scary. The type that pretend to be strong and scary were the easiest to handle.

Hathaway shuddered. He thought of saying, "You have no proof," but, remembering that Gigi hated excuses, he thought better of it.

Instead, he thought of a different way to go about it.

"You'll probably hate me for asking like this, but..."

"Try it," said Gigi, still looking off to the side.

"I'll escape it by asking a question. What makes you think that?"

"You boarded the *Haunzen*. You are clearly too young. And there was how you fought, too. There was plenty of circumstantial evidence."

"Why?"

"People are idiots when it comes to themselves, really."

"So, tell me..."

"Think about it. Meeting these guys using Mufti's name, you went

off and handed it to them, didn't you?"

"Ah!"

Hearing Gigi's words, Hathaway finally realized why he had done such a dangerous thing.

Gigi, seeing Hathaway's reaction, finally cracked a gentle smile.

"Just now, I...no, never mind. If you talk too much I will hate you for it."

"I won't tell anyone else. I don't want to be hated, after all... but talking to the person himself is fine right? It's so thrilling, and fun."

"Anything I say gets a retort so I won't say more... but don't forget that that sometimes words can kill a person. That's not a figure of speech."

Hearing Hathaway's words, Gigi moved uncomfortably, taking her hands from her chin and straightening her body.

Her face was pale.

"T-That's absolutely something I wouldn't want..."

"..."

This time, it was Hathaway's turn to become speechless. Gigi lacked sensibility, but she was not a girl who liked to talk.

Everything she said was what she truly believed, and, because of her belief in the power of words, she did not react much to normal, powerless speech.

Of course this would depend on whom she was talking to, but, at the very least, she had not lumped Hathaway in with the sly old politicians. To people that tickled her fancy, she was honest.

"Gigi Andalusia..."

"I'm not that kind of woman. Really, okay?"

"I know. But you should know that it's also something you should proceed with carefully."

"Yea... I've come to realize that lately."

"I see... it's difficult..."

"Idiot."

Hathaway's words, seemed to have brought color and sparkle to Gigi's eyes. Then, suddenly, the strength left her body and she sunk back into her chair.

The color in her eyes faded and she stared blankly at the water droplets collecting on a glass.

"Hey, Mr. Hero!"

Another cabinet minister slapped Hathaway on the back before moving on to another group.

"Even if it was speculation on your part, it hurts to be told the truth."

"...!"

Gigi nodded, her chin still sunk into her collarbone.

"Let's forget about this conversation."

"I won't forget... it's the same for you, right?"

Hathaway remained silent.

"Excuse me..."

The black-haired young man from the Bureau of Investigation that had been with Chief Geise was calling from off to the side. He announced that he wanted to question Gigi first.

Gigi hopped to her feet as if to shake off her fatigue and headed towards the lobby entrance.

"Oh boy..."

The unpleasant nature of the event had forced Hathaway to steel his resolve.

Escape was difficult. Hathaway did not know how the Kimberly Forces, who were stationed at the base, were deployed.

Hathaway returned to the table with his ginger ale and sat facing the window.

One of the island's regular flights was just taking off on the runway. That same sight had continued for a hundred years.

A month ago, Hathaway had seen reconnaissance photos of the airport, but those didn't tell him the extent of Kimberly Forces equipment or manpower.

That was the reason, after all, that Hathaway had made the trip to the moon in search of new mobile suits.

"The sooner Gauman and the others come, the worse the timing will be..." thought Hathaway.

Hathaway remembered the faces of his comrades he had not seen in over a month.

When it was decided that Hathaway would return on the *Haunzen*, he had considered several crisis avoidance strategies. In the case that Hathaway was caught in a situation and unable to act, Gauman would attack some nearby place.

The attack would help Hathaway avoid suspicion and give him an opportunity to escape.

A large number of staff had also been stationed in the Hong Kong area to check on Hathaway's status.

As for Davao, it was in close proximity to the base where Hathaway and the others were planning to carry out their campaign, so there were likely a larger than average number of liaison officers hiding in the area. But Hathaway was not in a position figure out whether they were aware of the day's events.

The phone in the lobby might be wiretapped. He couldn't risk using that.

The ad hoc questioning by the Bureau of Investigation was being held in the VIP Room next door. The cabinet ministers and their wives, upon finishing their questioning, greeted Hathaway before heading off to their designated hotels.

It was probably the authorities' decision to save Hathaway for last. For the person waiting, though, it was like waiting to step up onto the execution platform.

Gigi returned in less than ten minutes. After ordering a new juice

to replace her unfinished one from the hostess, she sat down next to Hathaway.

"Are you tired?"

"Huh?"

Hathaway was forced to consider again that something was wrong with Gigi's head.

Gigi had forgotten about her down moment from before. Her speech was so casual that it seemed she had completely forgotten about their earlier conversation.

"Well... yea..."

What else was he supposed to say?

"They'll take us to the hotel by limousine. I'll be waiting, okay?"

Gigi put the card in her hand on the table in front of Hathaway. It was a Tasaday Hotel membership card.

"You'll wait? What?"

"I want to see the hotel, so let's go together."

"Oh..."

Hathaway felt himself relaxing at Gigi's words.

This was Gigi. If she had been told about the hotel after questioning, then she had heard about Hathaway's lodgings too. In other words, she hadn't said anything to get Hathaway arrested.

"I see..."

Hathaway looked again at Gigi, her body stretched out and facing away from the window.

"What kind of girl are you?"

Gigi tilted her face, smiling and lifting up her hair with one hand.

"I want to be free. Look! The truth is difficult to see, right? If I want to know the truth, sometimes I have to be careful."

"Your drink is ready."

"Thank you very much."

Gigi politely gave her thanks to the hostess before putting the straw in her mouth.

Hathaway watched the juice disappear up the straw.

"...?"

Gigi's eyes were questioning.

"No, I was just thinking that the juice's color was beautiful... not to mention your lips as well."

"Is that some expression of thanks?"

"That too... but I'm just happy you're energetic again."

"I'm just fine. That's the reason I came to Earth, after all."

"Are you going to live in Hong Kong?"

"No... I think the mountains of Japan will be nice."

"Japan...? Can you get in?"

"I can."

"I see... I'd like to visit. My mother's ancestors are from there."

"So that's why you're making that face."

Gigi put her glass down and stared at Hathaway's face.

"Stop that..."

"Looking at you like that makes me want to say it."

"Say what?"

"Mufti's methods aren't the right way."

"If you have a better idea, please say it. Mufti will listen."

"I do have one."

Gigi had not lost her serious expression. Hathaway was surprised by the smooth, effortless reply.

"And what would that be?"

"If you want something without fail, then you need to establish the ideal dictatorship."

"Hahaha..."

Hathaway laughed to deflect Gigi's truth-filled words. For some looking "between" the people, for someone looking at society's problems from the outside, that was the truth.

"Is that weird?"

For the first time, Gigi had put on a dissatisfied, childlike expression.

"Well, you're right. But any human that can do such a thing is a god."

"Then you'll just have to become a god."

"Well, yes, but by the time such a person appears, all of humanity will have become gods."

"Oh, you're talking about Newtypes?"

"Yes. Reality isn't pretty. We aren't there yet. Even taking control of local governments isn't easy. A political takeover of an entity of the Earth Federation government's caliber isn't something that can be done by the will of a single individual."

"I see..."

"Organizations built by humanity aren't to be trifled with. That's why they are so huge. It's quite troublesome."

"But hijacking is terrible too. It was a scary ordeal."

"You're right."

"And being killed is even scarier."

"I think so too."

Hathaway really did think so.

"Mr. Hathaway, if you would, please."

It was the young man from the Bureau of Investigation.

"Ah... well then."

Gigi, rested her hands on her knees.

"Okay... I'll be waiting."

CHAPTER.8

HOTEL

"Thank you, Mr. Hathaway. You may return to your hotel now."

Chief Geise of the Bureau of Investigation returned his pen to its place in the inner pocket of his suit and signaled to the young man sitting next to Hathaway.

"Right... this is the hotel card. Please use it as you wish."

"Thank you. What about tomorrow?"

"We ask that you show up one more time. Captain Kenneth also said he wants to take a personal statement, so if you would..."

"Okay, so, what shall we do?"

"Ah, yes... I will call you tomorrow at 9 AM. We'll decide on your schedule then. If this place suits you, you can use the hotel as you wish."

"Indefinitely?"

Hathaway's question was a jest; his words were not a challenge to the bureaucrat.

"No problem. Just give the card to the front desk when you check out."

"Wow... That's convenient."

Although he didn't know if the offer was genuine, Hathaway was impressed. Retrieving his suitcase from the room where the younger Bureau staff were stationed, he then exited to the front lobby.

"Ms. Andalusia is waiting in the car."

"I see."

Hathaway looked around the lobby, feigning interest. On the inside, he was quite nervous, straining his faculties to keep track of every human around him.

The entrance to the Terminal Building was just like your average airport lobby. There was no sign of the Kimberly Forces anywhere.

"This way."

"Right!"

At that time, Hathaway caught sight of a young man who looked like one of his comrades, but there was no way he could exchange a greeting. Staying silent, he followed the young man from the Bureau.

In the refreshing night air of the entranceway, a light pink limousine awaited them.

This wasn't something he had expected, but, with Gigi standing there, it seemed to fit right in.

The day's heat had settled to a pleasant warmth, and quiet air around them gave the ideal sense of liberation that only the Earth could provide. To a five senses now accustomed to man-made artifices, the scent of the greenery around then was pleasantly stimulating.

"Go ahead," said Hathaway, suggesting that Gigi sit first.

"Mmm...standing here like this fills me with energy. I like it."

Saying that, Gigi climbed her way into the back seat.

The young man from the Bureau closed the door, and, as the car departed, Hathaway looked back and waved at him.

But his real intention was to observe the road behind them.

They made a half circle around the Terminal Building. Several parking lot exits lined the right of the road leading up to the highway entrance. A car made its way out of one of them and followed them.

"..."

Hathaway put his hopes in that car and settled back into the beige-weave rear seats.

"What's bothering you?" asked Gigi, whispering into his ear. Her lips were all too close. Feeling her breath and the warmth of her body, Hathaway jumped a little.

"Nothing... Or so I'd like to say, but I don't want you to hate me..." said Hathaway in a whisper, nose sliding into Gigi's hair.

"But danger would be even worse, so I can't."

Gigi's shoulders seemed to quiver at Hathaway's words.

"Hahaha!" Laughing, Gigi brought her cheek next to Hathaway's.

It was probably just an act, but, Hathaway felt as if he had caught scent of Gigi's womanly side. Feeling this was not something he could contend with, Hathaway drew back.

A expression, slightly pouting, seemed to appear on her face.

"...?"

The sight of her face filled Hathaway mind with questions, but Gigi sat back in her seat and turned to face the window.

"..."

Hathaway realized that he had said something terrible.

Even if it was an act, Gigi had wanted to enjoy that moment a bit longer.

And she didn't want to deal with a young man that could not guess at her feelings.

To Hathaway, who was already on edge, her feelings were not something he could imagine. Suppressing faint feelings of regret and anxiety, Hathaway looked out to the suburbs of the southern city.

Within twenty minutes, the Limousine had arrived at the Tasaday Hotel.

Built with cutting-edge technology a hundred years ago, the tropical architecture had ripened with age. A true first class hotel.

Coconut trees were planted in the center of the wide entrance area, and the evening sun's rays poured in from the ceiling skylights, highlighting the front of the building.

Hathaway and Gigi showed their cards. The reception clerk, stunned by Gigi's beauty as he was, showed no attempt to play favorites. He called a porter to bring their luggage.

"...?"

While they proceeded to the elevator, Hathaway caught a glimpse of the man from the airport over Gigi's shoulder.

"*Mihesher!*"

Relaxed at the sight of a familiar face, Hathaway followed Gigi and the porter onto the elevator.

Mishesh Hence was clearly looking at the elevator that they had just gotten on to.

The porter pressed the button to the 36th floor.

"The top floor is the 43rd? Anything up there?"

"Yes, a restaurant and bar. There's a dance floor too."

"...Wow!" Gigi let out a shout of glee.

The elevator door opened to a corridor lined with windows on the left. It was too splendid, almost, for a hotel corridor.

"What an amazing floor."

"Yes, this floor only has suites for long term guests."

"Wow! Impressive!"

Gigi followed the porter, making gleeful shouts at the sight of the ocean and the soft-lined mountains in the distance.

Off to the right of this scenery was the airport and Kimberley Forces.

The porter led them down near the end of the hall before handing Hathaway and Gigi keys to a pair of adjoining rooms. He then carried the suitcase to Gigi's room.

"What an amazing room!"

That Gigi would shout in delight was given. An extensive living room opened out to a view of the cape and the horizon beyond.

On the right was the main bedroom.

On the left was a dining room and another bedroom. The Davao cityscape spread out silently, faint now in the evening sun.

Compared to the century before, the city's population should be one-fifth of what it was before.

As the porter showed them the room, Hathaway followed him out to the veranda of the dining hall on the right and looked out over the

city.

Short mountains drew soft lines under the slowly darkening sky. Birds chirped off in the distance.

"Well, I'll be..."

Letting out a sigh, Hathaway leaned against the faux wood railing of the veranda.

Hathaway had realized that his presence in this difficult to escape location was a form of confinement. There were around a dozen floors to the top and thirty-odd floors to the bottom.

In other words, Hathaway had realized that he was trapped from above and below.

"Oh! You can leave Hathaway's suitcase here as well." Hathaway overheard Gigi's voice as the porter was showing the her around the kitchen, bathroom and dressing room.

"What?"

"Gigi! That's not a good idea," said Hathaway as Gigi followed the porter out of the closet room.

"Why?"

"I'm fine with the other room."

"No. I'll be sad sleeping alone in such a big room. Use this bedroom."

Gigi's words made sense.

"Fine, if you insist."

He couldn't have the porter carry it, so, handing the porter a tip, Hathaway set to moving his own suitcase.

"Please tell the front desk as well."

"Right away, sir."

"By the way, do you know if the passengers from the *Haunzen* staying here?"

"Oh, you two are from the *Haunzen* as well?"

"If we're here with the higher-ups, we'll probably see them in the dining hall, right? We'll need to prepare ourselves mentally, you know."

"I think so. I suppose you'll have to think about the social aspect."

Placing Hathaway's luggage on top of a cabinet by the wall, the porter informed that that three parties had checked in, but that he didn't know their names.

"Is there anything else you need?"

"Could you bring tea and something sweet to eat?" asked Gigi from the living room.

"Absolutely."

The dignified-looking porter walked briskly to a window side table, picked up the menu, and handed it to Gigi.

"Hmm, I'll have this three tart sampler and a milk tea. What about you, Hathaway?"

"I'd like some fruit if they have any..." said Hathaway, sitting down on the sofa in front of Gigi.

"They do. Kiwis, mandarin oranges and such."

"Mandarins will do. Those are Japanese, right?"

"Excellent. And what about to drink?" asked the porter.

"Same as mine."

Hathaway and the porter exchanged knowing smiles at Gigi's quick reply. Then, bowing, the porter left the room.

"I'm going to take a shower, that okay with you?"

"Yea. I'll be using mine too though, okay?"

"Okay, thanks. I need to relax. I don't want to have to be polite because you are here."

"Same for me."

Hathaway headed to his bedroom and opened his suitcase.

The entire shower room was lined with beautiful tile, and all of the shower items were made from ceramic. Hathaway felt a strange pressure, as if using the giant bathtub would cause his body to shrink.

"I'm not foolish enough to believe that a hotel prepared by the enemy is safe, but... How should go about Gigi?"

Feeling the almost-cold water of the shower and the satisfaction of having returned to Earth, Hathaway's thoughts returned to how he was going to get out of the hotel to meet with Mihesher and the others.

"We checked in with just the cards... We didn't leave our names. That means this is a place that can be used privately. Celebrities and officials probably bring their mistresses here... It probably isn't bugged..."

Still, if Mihesher was downstairs, Hathaway needed to meet with him and the others.

Checking his back teeth in the bathroom mirror, Hathaway withdrew a large pair of tweezers from his toiletry kit. At first glance, they looked like a normal pair of tweezers, but the tip was slightly curved. Hathaway used it to pull out one of his back teeth.

Under the removed wisdom tooth was a tooth-shaped capsule with microfilm hidden inside.

As he was changing, he heard Gigi humming from outside the door.

Hathaway slid the film from the tooth into his notebook, keeping the other item hidden in the leather cover of another notebook as it was. He then exited to the living room.

"Gigi...?!"

Before he could be shocked, Hathaway regretted not being cautious about Gigi being this kind of girl.

"Oh!"

Gigi gave him sour look and tried to wrap the towel around her shoulders, but her naked body reflected off the mirror, and Hathaway caught sight of her beautifully-proportioned body.

"How rude!"

"How can you even say that?" said Hathaway in a blunt voice.



"What...?"

At Hathaway's brisk response, Gigi quickly fixed the towel wrapped around her body.

"We aren't married or even living together... Yet you still walk around naked. I hate that kind of woman."

Hathaway walked to the table holding the food they had ordered and took the newly prepared room key.

Meanwhile, Gigi had retreated to her bedroom, shutting the door with a thud.

"Bullseye?" he wondered to himself as he figured that if he didn't at least spend the time to drink a cup of tea, he wouldn't be able to go outside. He poured himself a cup.

"Is she caught up about it...?" thought Hathaway.

Hathaway relaxed at the sweet smell of the tarts. A chance to go out for a walk had come naturally.

He knocked on Gigi's bedroom door asking if she wanted to go for a walk, but there was no reply.

"Gigi!" He called her name again.

"Go ahead!"

There seemed to be tears in her shout.

"I'm just going to take a look around the hotel."

Leaving those words, Hathaway went out to the corridor.

"So she's that kind of girl..."

With those practiced words, Hathaway drove Gigi from his mind. There might be a hasty judgment and a misunderstanding, but Hathaway had no intention of trying to understand Gigi's feelings and winning her favor.

"Still, if this makes her into an enemy, I may have been rash..." thought Hathaway as he waited for the elevator.

She might become his ally if they got along well. However, if she came to hate him, she might join the Bureau or Kenneth. That was how Gigi Andalusia was.

It was precisely because she was that kind of girl that Hathaway could let his guard down.

It seemed paradoxical, but if she was a normal girl, then Hathaway wouldn't have any desire to associate with her.

That was the kind of young man Hathaway had become.

"Yea, that's right."

His understanding spilled out in the form of words. Hathaway recognized that this was a dangerous side to him.

"She's the same as Quess Paraya, huh?"

The grief weighed heavily on Hathaway. He didn't even know how hard he had tried to forget that name. Still, there was no doubt that her existence had made Hathaway into the way he was.

So, by meeting someone like Gigi, he wanted her by his side unconditionally.

CHAPTER.9

CONTACT

Hathaway picked up a sightseeing pamphlet that sat next to one of the pillars near the front desk before dropping by the shopping arcade and the coffee lounge. He made sure his behavior was just as any hotel visitor's might be before then heading for the front door.

On his way out, Hathaway paused to wait for Mihesher Hence and the other young man to follow behind before exiting the building.

Wind had started to tickle at the palm leaves, but darkness had not yet fallen.

As Hathaway headed out onto the street, Mihesher passed him, carrying a bundle of documents.

"..."

Mihesher's right hand, the hand holding a bunch of documents, made a beckoning gesture at Hathaway. To an onlooker, it would appear simply as a matter of habit.

This series of events would continue for a while.

They exited onto a street crowded with cars, street lights and neon signs. Had it been twenty minutes now?

After turning several corners, a car, rusted from the salty ocean air, closed in next to Mihesher.

"That one, huh..."

Before Hathaway had time to fully comprehend the situation, he saw Mihesher turn and give a light hand signal. Hathaway broke into a run.

Misher slid onto the car and Hathaway followed nimbly behind. In the drivers seat of the car was the same young man from the airport.

"Good work."

The rear seats of the car shook as the car accelerated. "Is this okay?" asked a nervous Mihesher Hence.

"Better. Any sign of us being followed?"

The young driver with pitch black hair spoke up. "Sir. I've checked your surroundings carefully for followers."

"Good."

"This is Kenji Mitsuda. He works with us."

"Thanks."

"Yea..."

The young Asian man deftly handled the wheel of the shabby vehicle, maneuvering the car into the slipstream of evening traffic.

"It was an ordeal being alone among enemies. You're a great help."

"We weren't a burden?"

Mihesher had a terrible knack for noticing these kinds of things.

"First of all, this is the data for the course of the Gundam retrieval. Analyze it and make a copy for each machine."

"What do you mean?"

"It's the autopilot data."

"Oh! So I should hand it over to Iram?"

Mihesher was a woman who knew little of such matters.

"We know the time the new Gundam disguised as a meteor will fall. It'll happen tomorrow night. It can't be changed. Have Lodoicea hurry with preparations."

"Yes, we've made preparations, but... It was quite difficult, wasn't it?"

"Yea, hijackers using Mufti's name commandeered the *Haunzen*..."

Hathaway explained the circumstances of the Haunzen's arrival at the airport before asking the pair about the Mufti forces in Owenberry.

"It's true. There are a lot of men gathering there after hearing rumors of a Mufti base in Australia."

"Is this Quack Salver's doing?"

"No. It happened naturally. General Quack is happy about it, but we have not made contact with them."

"Around how many of them are there?"

"From what we've heard, there are about thirty thousand."

"I see... This kind of movement just shows that we were not wrong in our actions. But I also heard that the Kimberly Forces have left for Owenberry?"

"Yesterday. The main force launched an attack on Owenberry," said Mitsuda, the driver.

"Before the new commander arrived?"

"That's the reason, isn't it? They mobilized quite suddenly."

"I see. The news made Kimberly panic, huh? And thanks to that, our preparations for the Gundam's retrieval went undisturbed..."

"Yea. but it won't be like that with the new commander arriving in Davao."

"We know. The new model mobile suit coming to Davao was also the new commander's doing, wasn't it?"

"New model?"

"We haven't confirmed this, but it seems they are currently testing it."

"I knew it! When we were taking time for final adjustments on the moon, I heard news of a new Earth Federation mobile suit and took some forced measures, but... To think that we would lose time due to this incident... I got on the *Haunzen* expecting reliability and it ended with this mess."

"Were the Mufti frauds from the group in Owenberry?"

"I don't know. It's possible."

"What will you do, Hathaway?"

"I probably won't be able to leave from the Tasaday Hotel all of tomorrow morning. Treat the situation as if I am under the surveillance of the Federation's Bureau of Investigation and the Kimberly Forces."

"So we don't need to make a diversion?"

"No, you should. Kenneth is investigating me carefully. My personal history has some suspicious points."

"And what about this Gigi girl? You'll be all right around her, right?"

"I still don't know if she will be a scapegoat for me or if she's a Kimberly spy."

"What do you mean?"

"Forgive me for not giving an explanation. It's complicated... It's better if you make a diversionary attack to remove suspicion."

"It'll be dangerous..."

"Yea. My room is on a middle floor. Attack one of the higher ones."

"But..."

"Also, please inform Professor Amada in Menado that there might be a military investigation."

"Yes sir."

"...And the Gundam will come on time. Got it?"

"We'll be returning to Lodoicea by Mitsuda's plane... We'll come back in the *Emeralda*."

"I'm counting on you."

Circling the city, Mitsuda's car set a course back to the Tasaday Hotel.

CHAPTER.10

HUNTER

"This is bad... Hunters."

"What?"

Hearing Mitsuda's voice, Hathaway looked forward from the rear seat.

The population of the area was small, but a crowd was causing quite a commotion on the street near the entertainment district as evening set in. There were a number of black minivans right in the center of the street blocking the path, and around them men dressed in all black leather uniforms were intimidating the crowd.

"What do you want to do?"

"Hathaway will probably be fine, but we'll be arrested."

Mihesher turned up the collar of her jacket. She had already had the unfortunate experience of being caught by said Hunters, and forcibly deported to space. A second arrest would see her sent to a border colony known as "the remote island". More than anything, it was the utter shame that came with the deportations the Hunters administered as punishment that filled people with fear.

"We know this place just as well as they do, so..."

Saying this, Mitsuda casually turned the car right onto a backstreet.

"They didn't spot us?"

"They were busy loading the people they caught into the carriers..."

Alternately checking his left and right mirrors, Mitsuda took care to avoid the people coming and going on the narrow path.

"If they have you cornered, crunch the film in your teeth. We have another."

"R-Right. I'll do that..."

"Ugh, son of a...!"

A single car appeared ahead, and Mitsuda panicked and pulled the car to the right in an effort to get away. The car's speed rose slightly as he did so, and they emerged onto the next street.

Unsure for a moment of which direction to turn, Mitsuda brought the car to a halt.

"...?"

Hathaway inadvertently made eye contact with a black visored man through his side window.

Hunters always dressed completely in black when working, regardless of the climate. That alone was evidence enough that they were a group who delighted in intimidating people.

"You. Let's see your residency permit!"

The man tapped the car's glass with the tip of his nightstick.

Hathaway attempted to lower the window, but just as he did so, Mitsuda started the car, and sent it hurtling to the right. Hathaway slammed against the backrest, and the Hunter tumbled forwards, screaming with rage.

"Son of a bitch!"

The Hunter immediately pulled out his pistol, and began threateningly firing off rounds while calling to his cohorts.

"Somebody was shot!" Mihesher cried out, glancing backwards.

Despite his seemingly mild mannered demeanor, Mitsuda was an outstanding driver. The old fashioned gasoline-powered car had obviously been tuned up, and weaved through oncoming car after oncoming car as it shot towards the suburbs.

The sound of a hunter patrol car rang out from behind, and others could be heard closing in from the left and right.

"Hathaway, get out!"

"What about you?"

"I'll find somewhere to burn the car, or sink it into the sea."

"You can do that?"

"I had several places in mind in case this happened."

Making two turns, Mitsuda rapidly decelerated, and let Hathaway out.

"Sorry for bailing. Don't let them catch you, okay?"

Without even taking the time to listen to Hathaway's words, Mitsuda sent the car speeding away, the rubber of its tires burning on the concrete. Not having the luxury of being able to see the car off, Hathaway began to walk back in the opposite direction, doing his best to regain a calm expression.

Three minivans went speeding past, sending other vehicles scattering.

"...!?"

Hathaway spotted machine guns installed on the roofs of the vehicles, and heard the Hunters screaming something.

"We're acting on behalf of the military..."

Swearing loudly in his head, Hathaway looked for a taxi, but panicked when he didn't see any passing by. He realized that having left without making dinner plans with Gigi could arouse suspicion too.

Worrying about Mihesher and Mitsuda wouldn't do any good. Hathaway tried to put them out of his mind, went to a souvenir shop, and bought a typical tourist souvenir.

"Did they check your residency permit?" the clerk asked as she punched the register. She looked like a local.

"Of course. It happens often here?"

"It's been rough here since the reinforcement of the Earth Federation Forces. They'll even surprise you in your sleep. I wonder why Mufti doesn't take care of them?"

"Say stuff like that in a place where Hunters are hanging about," Hathaway said, taking his receipt, "and you could get yourself deported."

"Heh heh... But don't you think Mufti are pretty dense?"

"Guess so... By the way, there aren't any taxis on call around here?"

"If you go about 500 meters to your right, there's a taxi rank. It's pretty noisy over there about now."

"Thanks."

Knowing that the date and time would be printed on his receipt, Hathaway tore it up, threw it away, and reluctantly headed for the taxi rank.

The Hunters still seemed to be spreading their net there. Hathaway found himself with the unenviable job of waiting for a car at the rank while watching a black patrol car ahead. Worse still, the car, some 200 meters in front, gradually began edging closer. Hathaway began to consider running away.

"Urgh!"

The door of the building behind Hathaway slammed open, and a group of three or four people stumbled out as if they had been thrown. Some Hunters soon followed.

"You've got to be shitting me!"

"You're violating our human rights!"

The man who yelled this found his chin met by the tip of a Hunter's boot.

"Stop this!"

A woman clutched at the Hunter, and was struck by his nightstick. She crumpled on her side, and another Hunter kicked her in the groin.

"...!?"

"If you're looking for a taxi, wait over there!" yelled a Hunter at Hathaway, as another group emerged hurriedly from a patrol car, "Can't you see you're in the way?!"

The Hunters' tone was more polite when they addressed someone who wasn't being arrested, but Hathaway received a poke with his nightstick all the same.

"Ugh!"

A handful more men and women were thrown out of the building, and a gunshot rang out.

As Hathaway moved away from the taxi rank, he noticed that the gunshot had come from near the third floor.

"You bastards!"

The machine gun on the patrol car parked in the taxi rank repeatedly rang out, sending a flash across the lingering light in the sky.

"..."

The firefight continued for a handful of seconds. One of the Hunters on the street fell over, and two men in t-shirts spilled out of the window, falling to the ground with a sickening crunch.

"..."

With the same terrified look as the other citizens, Hathaway walked out onto the road. Weaving through the patrol cars, he found a taxi amid the cars splayed across the street.

"Please! Let me in!"

The driver waved Hathaway away with his hand.

"The Hunters said to find a taxi here. Look. They've taken the taxi rank over there."

The driver looked towards the grisly scene unfolding near the patrol cars, and then signaled to Hathaway to open the back door. Taking care to make sure that the driver saw the plastic souvenir bag he was carrying, Hathaway got in, and gave the name of a building near the Tasaday Hotel.

"It'll take us a while to get through this street."

"Will you charge a big premium?"

"Nah, not really."

Making eye contact with the driver as he checked his back mirror for people, Hathaway did his best to make conversation like a regular passenger.

"The Hunters here are bad, huh?" The driver asked as the car picked up speed, and he had a moment to catch his breath.

"It was pretty shocking to see a firefight right in front of my eyes like that. It looked like there were casualties."

"Happens every other day. I can't work out why Mufti won't do something about them."

"For sure. They're the people they should be looking to take care of."

"Right? I'm not educated and I don't know the details, but the Earth Federation government is deporting people into space and capturing those who complain, right?"

"That's right..."

Despite his vague replies to the driver's controversial opinions, Hathaway felt quietly relieved that the public wished to see the Hunters punished by Mufti for openly engaging in gang violence.

After all, it was true to say that Hathaway and Mufti were actively engaging in military force themselves. And those using force always want to believe that that force is excusable if justice is on their side.

"Mufti are too educated for their own good, I reckon. It's all very well for them to play the part and take on the big guys, but their eventual plan is for us all to go into space too, right? Can't say I understand that. It's not like Davao's particularly polluted."

"But there's not much greenery these days, and you can't catch fish, right?"

"Sure, but the people on the islands, at least, have no problem finding food."

"Haha, guess so. But I think Mufti are talking about the Earth a thousand years down the line. So I wonder if they don't have a point."

The driver burst out laughing. "I'm guessing they have a lot of time on their hands. I don't have the luxury of thinking that far ahead."

"The luxury?"

This normal, run of the mill word shocked Hathaway. It was true. For the public, when life got mad it was all they could do to think about the next day. He couldn't deny that people could get tunnel vision when they began to think only about how to further a certain cause.

"You don't think so? You can't really think about tomorrow when all that's on your mind is the money you're going to have to put into some rich guy's pocket to get yourself a residency permit."

"I'm in the same boat there," Hathaway agreed, staring vacantly at the side of the road as the rows of coconut trees gave way to the evening sky.

It was just like the driver and Gigi said. It was true that he was possessed by a furious desire to put a stop to all of those systems if he had the power.

However, he was horrified at the depth of the organizations that the Earth Federation government had built within society, which could be seen even in the Research Bureau's door key system at the Tasaday Hotel. In order to destroy that depth, he needed to send fear to the very core of those organizations. If he didn't, then it was only logical to assume that there would be no reform of the Earth Federation government.

Focusing on that one issue, Hathaway became frustrated.

In order to stay on Earth, it was currently necessary to obtain a permit administered by the Earth Federation government. This had begun as a necessary evil after migration to space colonies became common, and enacting forced migration became an essential to avoid the migration process becoming discriminatory.

After the Earth was polluted by waste products from the development of modern civilization, and the greenhouse effect caused its average temperature to rise two degrees, people became filled with a sense of impending doom. Constant food shortages and

destruction of nature wrought by the abnormal weather reduced the earth to a state where it could no longer tolerate human life, and space migration became a necessity. However, if the earth really came to an end, humanity would lose the power to construct space colonies and expand into space.

The Earth Federation government was established after the realization that humanity was headed for its extinction along with the earth spread outwards from the cities. And construction of space colonies began. The Earth Federation's plan to indiscriminately take all of humanity into space once the space migration began was not misguided.

However, special case exceptions in the policy later gave rise to discrimination. The Earth Federation government made provisions for those deemed necessary to remain on Earth. There was a condition: those allowed to stay had to be those who would manage nature so as to preserve the Earth, or those who could preserve and conserve humanity's native cultures.

The law did not carry out that principle in an ideal fashion, and as the Earth didn't appear to be on the verge of death to the average person, it was natural for it to be broadly interpreted and exploited.

What's more, as those born on Earth were unable to forget the feeling of its gravity, people began to appear who ignored the law unconditionally on that basis.

That desire was understandable. Humanity's greatest sin, however, was not acknowledging the realization that the most dangerous thing for the Earth was their own propagation.

In this era, space migration was a price that humanity itself was forced to pay; the era of the space colonies was neither a frontier era, nor one of openness. That the frustration born of this realization only further lit the flame of the those who lived in space colonies - the Spacenoids - desire to return to Earth was paradoxical, but ultimately a natural outcome.

Humanity's continuing to see Earth as the only home it could return to after its propagation was its second sin.

In order to completely revive the world, it was necessary to wait a thousand years. And in the space of a thousand years, humanity would only further multiply. In short, people had to be prepared for the truth that the entirety of humanity could no longer live on Earth.

This too was a truth people were unable to admit.

Now, though, all exceptional clauses had to be removed, and humanity in its entirety had to be forced to withdraw to the colonies. If that was not done, then Hathaway felt that the spirits of those who died in Char's Rebellion would not be able to rest in peace.

Char Aznable had thrust that same ambition upon the Earth Federation government, but had fallen before the Federation's overwhelming military force. That had been the ultimate outcome of the conflict known as "Char's Rebellion".

At the time of the rebellion, Hathaway had happened to be aboard the battleship of his father, who served the Earth Federation government. And there, he had seen battlefields.

It was also through that conflict that he had met the girl named Quess Paraya. She had viewed the war with innocent, almost childish eyes, and was so sensitive that it overwhelmed and killed her.

Hathaway had heard the voice of the spirit of that girl who had been his first love, along with all of those who had died in the void of space.

It was probably nothing more than blind faith. But Hathaway believed that in the final days of Char's Rebellion, he had heard countless screams. Screams of friends and foes alike that had been swallowed by flames in the fight to protect the Earth.

After this, Hathaway felt he needed to study the problems surrounding these individuals and organizations. He also learned the career of Char Aznable.

Realizing that Char's eventual conclusion had been that the planet which had given birth to humanity could not be allowed to be destroyed and had to be preserved, Hathaway found himself deeply empathizing with the man.

Reality, however, threw difficult phenomena into people's paths.

Had the core idea of the space colony age to almost empty the Earth and come up with a way of prolonging its life been followed, and had the migration law been enacted fairly, then the black uniforms of the Hunters and their exposure of unlawful residents might have been seen as a symbol of justice.

"So long as there are exceptional clauses, people will continue to do wrong..."

Bidding farewell to the cheerful driver, Hathaway walked for around five minutes, and arrived at the Tasaday Hotel.

At the hotel's front desk, a message had arrived stating that a car would be coming from the Research Bureau at ten the next morning.

Gigi wasn't in the room.

To avoid the hassle of having to greet the cabinet members he met on the Haunzen, Hathaway ordered room service. He spread his postcards and other documents in front of him while eating in the same sloppy way that Gigi would.

At the same time, he was prepared for the fact that if Gigi had told Kenneth how she had been feeling, there would be no escape for him.

It was fine even if he was caught. At the very least, Lodoicea would recover the Gundam. It was partly for that reason that the central administration of Mufti had come to the area.

Hathaway ate his sauteed sole, all the while feeling guilty towards his companions. He had barely started the meal when Gigi returned.

"Hey! What are you doing eating dinner in a place like this, Mr. Hero?"

It was Kenneth.

"Why are you here?"

The fact that Kenneth had shown up made Hathaway nervous. He was supposed to be busy.

"What do you mean? You abandoned me to go out walking, so I asked him to be my dinner partner. We're just heading out now. The Captain is busy, but he's so nice that he came anyway..."

Gigi casually bounced into her bedroom.

"What are you doing here?" Kenneth asked.

Giving the excuse he had prepared, Hathaway tried to establish whether Gigi had told Kenneth about him.

"Where are you going for dinner?"

"Not telling. I mean you'll have her tonight, right? I have to steal her away from you before that."

"Be my guest."

"You don't care?"

"I'm not interested in her like that. Anyway, what's happening with the Research Bureau and your investigation tomorrow?"

"We've decided to have the crew and cabinet members from the front cabin come to our headquarters. All you'll have to do is sign the official record I've written up once the Research Bureau finishes up."

Kenneth twirled the cheap souvenir Hathaway had bought in his hands.

"This is pretty tacky."

"You think? I've never bought anything like that before. I wanted something that was properly handmade."

"Heh... Guess you're still a kid after all, irrespective of achievements."

"Maybe you're right. It's not very grown up, huh?"

"I looked into your background. Back when Char's Rebellion happened you were just a brat, but you snuck aboard your old man's ship, and even wound up piloting a mobile suit. Heard you fought well, to boot. You shot down an enemy machine, right?"

"Yeah, against military regulations... It caused a lot of problems for my father."

"Pretty impressive to be able to do that with no training. Besides, the army is a pretty irresponsible place anyway, so by my reckoning, you got that part right too."

"I guess so."

"That hasn't changed, by the way. Looking into Kimberly's record of work makes me shake my head in despair."

"Wasn't he pretty effective during the dispatch to that place - Owenberry, was it?"

"You've got to be kidding. That was just to spite me. I was supposed to be taking command of his unit in three days, but thanks to the Haunzen incident, things wound up like this. Kimberly was planning on putting on a good show by then and returning to space."

"Hmm... Things are pretty complex there, huh?"

"Yep. It's an organization, after all."

"You must have to work hard."

"It's normal when you come from a common background. I wish I had a famous father."

"That can create pressures of its own."

"I guess so..."

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

Gigi had changed into a dark blue dress that exposed both of her shoulders, and was in high spirits. Being able to change your mood with a dress was clearly one of the perks of being a girl.

"Captain, lace up the cord for me. The cord on this dress is kinda wispy, and it's hard to tie..."

"Heh heh..."

Winking at Hathaway, Kenneth turned to Gigi's back, and tied the dress's cord for her.

Sipping his tea, Hathaway watched them out of the corner of his eye, doing his best to remind himself that Gigi just had a very ingratiating way about her.